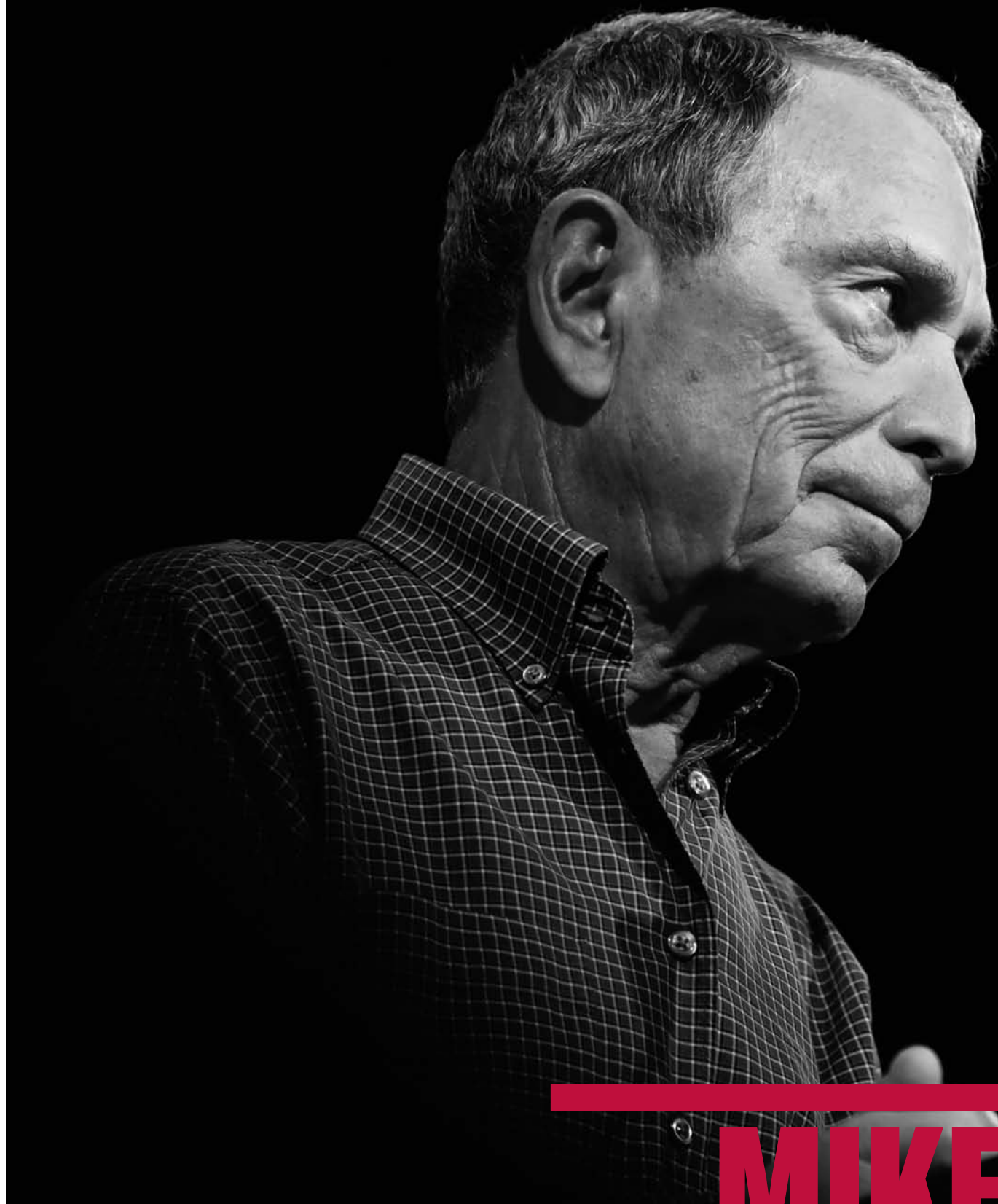


**THE**

**= FOR MORE, SEE [BLOOMBERGFILES.ORG](https://bloombergfiles.org) =**

# **INDYPENDENT**

**#255: MARCH 2020 • [INDYPENDENT.ORG](https://indypendent.org)**



**BAIL REFORM  
PANIC  
P6**

**MEXICO'S  
BERNIE  
P20**

**OUTSIDER ART  
P22**

ROB LAQUINTA

---

## **MIKE CHECK**

**IN HIS PRESIDENTIAL BID, FORMER NYC MAYOR MICHAEL  
BLOOMBERG IS RUNNING FROM HIS RECORD NOT ON IT.  
BUT WE'VE GOT THE RECEIPTS. P11-19**



**THE INDYPENDENT, INC.**  
388 Atlantic Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
212-904-1282  
www.indypendent.org  
Twitter: @TheIndypendent  
facebook.com/TheIndypendent

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**  
Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold,  
Alina Mogilyanskaya, Ann  
Schneider, John Tarleton

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR:**  
John Tarleton

**MANAGING EDITOR:**  
Peter Rugh

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:**  
Ellen Davidson, Alina  
Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas  
Powers, Steven Wishnia

**ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR:**  
Frank Reynoso

**DESIGN DIRECTOR:**  
Mikael Tarkela

**DESIGNERS:**  
Leia Doran, Anna Gold, Evan  
Sult

**ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER:**  
Dean Patterson

**GENERAL INQUIRIES:**  
contact@indypendent.org

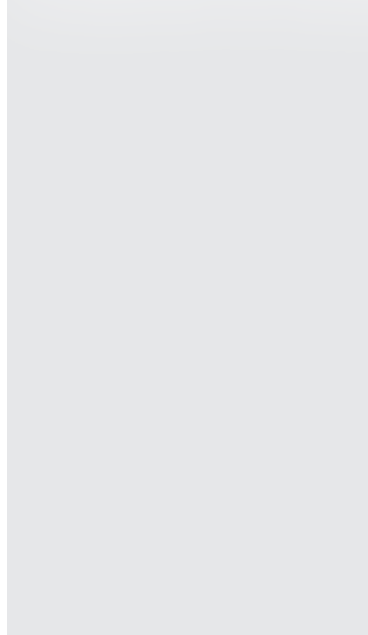
**SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:**  
submissions@indypendent.org

**ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:**  
ads@indypendent.org

**VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:**  
Linda Martín Alcoff, Charlyne  
Alexis, Eleanor Bader, Bennett  
Baumer, Jenny Blair, Sue Brisk,  
Valerio Ciriaci, Rico Cleffi,  
Renée Feltz, Lynne Foster,  
Emma Gaffney, Esteban  
Guerra, Theodore Hamm,  
David Hollenbach, Manvi  
Jalan, Carrie Klein, Derek  
Ludovici, Martin Mahoney,  
Leonardo March, Gary  
Martin, Farid Nassif, Tiffany  
Pai, Donald Paneth, Libby  
Rainey, Mark Read, Reverend  
Billy, Olivia Riggio, Chelsey  
Sanchez, Steven Sherman, Julia  
Thomas, Tyrone Wallace, and  
Chris Wright.

**VOLUNTEER DISTRIBUTORS:**  
Erik Anders-Nilssen, Eric  
Brelsford, Chris & Pam  
Brown, Hank Dombrowski,  
Joseph Epstein, Kim Frazcek,  
Lew Friedman, Mindy  
Gershon, Tami Gold, Priscilla  
Grim, Laura Kaplan, Michael  
Korn, Jane LaTour, Dave  
Lippman, Ashley Marinaccio,  
Christine Miller, Saul Nieves,  
Caroline Rath, Liam Reilly,  
Norm Scott, Carol Smith, and  
Becky Vaughan.

# EDITOR'S NOTE



## A TALE OF TWO BLOOMBERGVILLES

It's 7 a.m. on a Saturday morning and a row of sleeping bags wraps around the base of the Woolworth Building from Park Place onto Broadway. Covered from the elements by scaffolding, two dozen bleary-eyed campers (including this reporter) slowly wake up amid stacks of empty pizza boxes and a scattering of homemade protest signs.

Welcome to Bloombergtown. It's June 2011 and this motley collection of protesters is trying to call attention to then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg's push to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from vital government programs and services and layoff thousands of city workers. Living across the street from the south end of City Hall Park, Bloombergtown's inhabitants share a sense of outrage about the mayor's proposed cuts and a determination to do something more than hold the usual protest rally.

"If you are a Wall Street banker, you have access to Bloomberg whenever you need it," one protester tells me. "But if you are from the boroughs and are a worker or a student or a teacher, you can't even get to the steps of City Hall."

Bloombergtown would disperse after three weeks. Many of its participants would go on to play key roles several months later at Occupy Wall Street — the protest movement that would put class at the center of American politics for the first time in decades, before the police swept it away at Bloomberg's command.

Nine years later, the same forces are arrayed against each other. This time Bloomberg is running for president with billions of dollars of his own money to throw around while the movement of the 99 percent has coalesced around Bernie Sanders and, to a lesser extent, Elizabeth Warren.

In corporate speak, think of the Democratic Party as a "distressed asset" — a legacy brand poorly run for years by senior management and now facing a hostile takeover by angry shareholders who think they can do a better job running things. The company's board is desperate to find a white knight investor who will buy them out while allowing them to keep all their perks and privileges. Enter Michael Bloomberg.

We've seen this movie before.

As with Trump, New York City was the petri dish where Bloomberg's public career came to life. Where Trump honed his brash outer-borough tabloid persona and built gold-plated monuments to himself, Bloomberg, the Upper East Side patrician, systematically bought off everyone in his path. He spent \$268 million in his three mayoral campaigns, overwhelming his opponents. His philanthropic arm injected over half a billion dollars into local arts and nonprofit groups, buying their gratitude and silence in equal measure.

Bloomberg's mayoral reign was not without its technocratic achievements — a ban on indoor

smoking, the first bike lanes and the advent of the 311 help line — but being ruled by the richest man in town mostly sucked. It was gentrification and displacement on steroids. Forty percent of the city was rezoned for the benefit of real estate speculators. A brutal police force terrorized neighborhoods consisting predominantly of people of color and wielded an iron fist against any public displays of dissent.

For most of his time in office, most of the New York City media gave Bloomberg uncritical, often adoring coverage. The *Times*, the *Daily News* and the *Post* might as well have been working out of his press office. When Bloomberg decided to seek the repeal of term limits so he could run for a third term, he met first with the owners of those esteemed publications and received their promise of support.

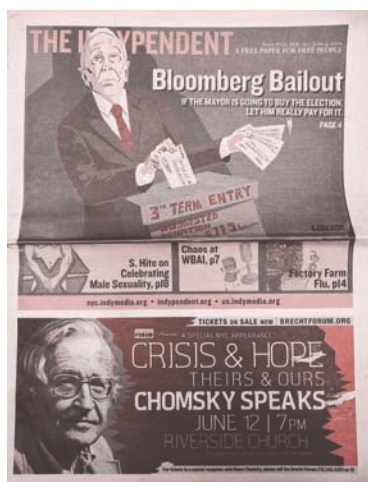
The wheels came off the wagon in Bloomberg's third term. The \$600 million CityTime scandal, the botched response to a blizzard that dumped 26 inches of snow on the city while the mayor vacationed in Bermuda and a fumbling response to Hurricane Sandy finally called his reputation for managerial expertise into question while the unceasing expansion of racist stop-and-frisk policing sparked a backlash that could not be ignored.

Now Bloomberg is at it again, using his great wealth to rebrand himself to the rest of the country as a pragmatic leader who "gets things done" while receiving endorsements from scores of prominent Democrats who are past beneficiaries of his largesse. For them, living in Bloombergtown means something very different.

As we go to press a few days before Super Tuesday, it's unclear how Bloomberg's gambit will pan out. He's proven to be a terrible debater, but his wealth may well keep him at the center of the race through the spring and summer.

Here at *The Independent*, we covered the grassroots movements that resisted Bloomberg's plutocratic regime and fought for a more just city that could make room for all of us. We haven't forgotten what he got done. This issue is dedicated to the people who fought those struggles, often against great odds. What we can fit in the pages of this newspaper is only the tip of the iceberg. We have also launched a website, bloombergfiles.org, where we will share more New Yorkers' stories of life under Bloomberg. If you would like to share your story or just leave a comment, you can reach us at contact@indypendent.org or 212-904-1282.

— John Tarleton



# ADVERTISE IN THE INDY

UNIQUE AUDIENCE • AFFORDABLE RATES • PERSONAL ATTENTION  
FOR MORE INFORMATION, EMAIL ADS@INDYPENDENT.ORG OR CALL 212-904-1282

# THE INDYPENDENT





BEAVER ON THE BEATS

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

# MARCH

**FRI MARCH 6**  
8PM–3AM • FREE  
PARTY: VERSO RED PARTY  
Featuring DJ Mom It's Goth. Cheap drinks. Dancing till late.  
Verso Books  
20 Jay St., Suite 1010, Bklyn

**SAT MARCH 7**  
6PM–11PM • \$15–\$18  
MUSIC: JOHNNY CASH BIRTHDAY BASH  
C'mon and get rhythm at the annual Johnny Cash birthday bash with Linda Hill and special guests Monica Passin, David Haught, Cliff Wesfall and others to be announced. WFMU's DJ Radio Honky Tonk Girl will be spinning top-flight 45s before and after the show. A portion of the proceeds go toward immigrant and refugee aid.  
Saint Thomas Aquinas Church  
249 9th St., Bklyn

**SAT MARCH 7**  
9PM–3AM • \$18–\$35, 21+  
PARTY: BROOKLYN MARDI GRAS: BRASS BAND BLOWOUT!  
Dance your beads off to killer brass bands and enjoy authentic NoLA cocktails at the bar. Find the baby in the King Cake, and be king for the night with a crown, mask, beads and a drink ticket. Wear your glittering best.  
Address with RSVP  
geminiaandscorpio.com/events

**SUN MARCH 8**  
3PM–5PM • \$5–\$20 suggested donation  
SCREENING: *SQUATTER'S OPERA*  
In 2019, a group of 25 Lower East Side veteran squatters, artists, musicians and activists came together to resurrect the ditty "Live Free Or Die" from the late Michael Shenker's collection of songs that came to be known as *The Squatter's Opera*. Simeon Rose created this short film of the event. This piece explains the hows and whys of squatting via an informative introduction by graphic artist Seth Tobocman, then shows the musical characterization of scenes from real life squatting.  
Theatre 80  
80 St. Mark's Pl., Mnhtn

**MON MARCH 9**  
6:30PM–8PM • FREE  
TALK: RACE FOR PROFIT: A LECTURE BY KEEANGA-YAMAHTTA TAYLOR  
Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor discusses her new book, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, which uncovers how exploitative real estate practices continued well after housing discrimination was banned.  
Diana Center, Barnard College  
3009 Broadway, Mnhtn

**THURS MARCH 12**  
5PM–9PM • FREE  
LIT: JUST POETS  
A radical poetry reading and musical performance hosted by Pitts, a poet for justice with something to say.  
Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space  
155 Avenue C, Mnhtn

**SAT MARCH 14**  
5PM–8PM • FREE  
GATHERING: A PEOPLE'S VICTORY CELEBRATION OF THE RELEASE OF THE MOVE 9 WITH DELBERT AFRICA  
Over the past three years activists have won the release of all of the surviving members of the MOVE 9 who have been wrongfully incarcerated for over 40 years. This will be Delbert Africa's first trip to New York City since his release in January. He will be joined by other members of the MOVE 9 and of the MOVE organization.  
Holyrood Episcopal Church/Iglesia Santa Cruz  
715 W. 179th St., Mnhtn

**THURS MARCH 19**  
8PM • \$45–\$100  
MUSIC: YASIIN BEY: *BLACK ON BOTH SIDES* 20TH ANNIVERSARY  
Rapper, singer, actor and activist Yasiin Bey — better known as Mos Def — is celebrating the release of his first solo record.  
Sony Hall  
235 W. 46th St., Mnhtn

**FRI MARCH 20**  
7PM–2AM • \$10–\$12  
PARTY: TECHNORUZZ: IRANIAN

**TRUTH SAYER:**  
Rapper and activist Yasiin Bey/Mos Def marks the 20th anniversary of his breakout album.

**NEW YEAR PARTY**  
A dance party in observance of the vernal equinox and Iranian New Year. Iranian tea and sweets, zines and prints by Iranian artists and more.  
Market Hotel  
1140 Myrtle Ave., Bklyn

**MON MARCH 23**  
7PM–9PM • \$30  
BOOK LAUNCH: *FIGHT OF THE CENTURY*  
To mark the ACLU's centennial, authors Michael Chabon and Aeyet Waldman have collaborated to curate an anthology of original essays by writers who illuminate historic decisions — from *Brown v. Board of Education* to *Roe v. Wade* — that have advanced civil liberties and social justice. Chabon and Waldman will be joined in conversation by ACLU president Susan Herman and several of the book's contributors.  
The New York Public Library  
Fifth Avenue at 42nd St., Mnhtn

**FRI MARCH 27**  
7PM–8:30PM • \$30  
MUSIC: JOG BLUES: IMPROVISING IMPERMANENCE  
Jog Blues brings together masters of jazz, blues and Indian classical music in a 21st-century mix, creating an experience drawing from deep traditions but swinging toward the future. The band is named for Jog, the Indian midnight raga, and the blues, the most American of music genres.  
Rubin Museum of Art  
150 W. 17th St., Mnhtn

**SUN MARCH 29**  
12PM–6PM • FREE  
LIT: NYC FEMINIST ZINEFEST 2020  
Feminist zinesters of the world unite!  
Barnard College  
3009 Broadway, Mnhtn

# IN THIS ISSUE

**LEGALIZE IT, P5**  
*Decrim NY is fighting to lift statutes used to target trans individuals for sex crimes.*

**CAMPAIGN OF FEAR, P6**  
*NY police and prosecutors are pushing lawmakers to restore an unjust cash bail system.*

**THE NEWS IN BRIEF, P8**  
*Broker fee ban halted, NYC seawall blocked, Revolting Lesbians drive climate denier off museum board, plus more.*

**WHO PAYS FOR FOSSIL FUELS?, P9**  
*With Nat Grid seeking a rate hike for its latest pipeline, you do.*

**HACKING THE PARTY, P10**  
*Can the Sanders movement take over the formless blob that is the Democratic Party?*

**FIGHTING FOR SANDERS, TAKING ON TRUMP, P11**  
*Longtime Muslim rights activist and Women's March organizer Linda Sarsour talks with The Indy.*

**IF YOU BUILD IT, THE RICH WILL COME, P12**  
*Our Bloomberg coverage begins with a look at how he gentrified the city.*

**WHAT WAS HIS CRIME?, P13**  
*Bloomberg's NYPD stopped-and-frisked my father, then arrested him for having a Muslim name.*

**WALL STREET'S MAYOR, P14**  
*Big Banks had a champion at City Hall, even as they foreclosed on thousands of NYC homeowners.*

**GOODNIGHT, NYCHA, P15**  
*How NYC's public housing system fell apart on Bloomberg's watch.*

**CLASS STRUGGLE, P16**  
*A scathing indictment of our ex-mayor's neoliberal education policies.*

**UNION BUSTER, P17**  
*When Bloomberg ruled New York, his contempt for workers was unparalleled.*

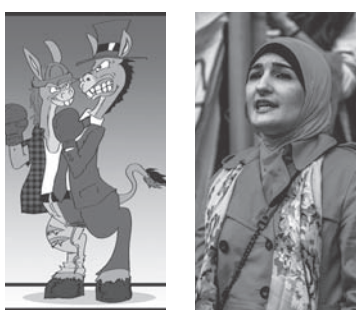
**GITMO ON-THE-HUDSON, P18**  
*More than 1,800 protesters were detained when NYC hosted the 2004 RNC.*

**MEXICO'S BERNIE, P20**  
*Mexico's new leftish president confronts a corrupt system.*

**FROM POP STAR TO POPULIST, P21**  
*Bobi Wine is challenging decades of autocratic rule in Uganda.*

**FROM THE MARGINS, P22**  
*A look at a gallery specializing in "Outsider Art."*

**THE TRUMP HELP HOTLINE, P23**  
*Rev. Billy on managing election-year expectations and fighting fear.*





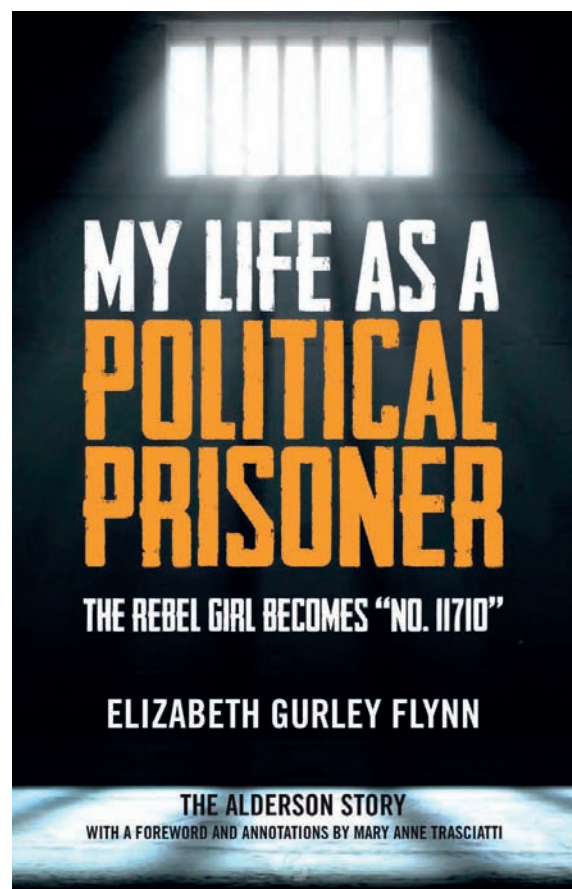
"If poetry  
is truly a  
decolonial  
practice . . .



. . . then this anthology lifts its lyrical machete, . . . its queerness, its nonbinary they, its sense of lineage, family, tradition, pride, and, refreshingly, its Blackness. You will find poets in conversation, in celebration, in protest, in demonstration, in a collective breakbeat that is informed by ritual, but also a resistance to the normalized ways of looking at stanzas, patria, sex, gender, patriarchy, and nationalism."

—Willie Perdomo, from the introduction

## New From International Publishers



Visit our website  
[www.intpubnyc.com](http://www.intpubnyc.com)  
or call:  
212-366-9816

# MARCH 2019

## SPRING FAIR

**MARCH 21 @ 1:00 PM - 8:00 PM**

Come to the Spring Fair at The People's Forum! Shop for books from collections from a variety of radical and leftist presses, find treasures from talented local artists, and enjoy a full program of performances. You won't wanna miss this!

**WOMEN WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!**

f t i #peoplesforumnyc

320 West 37th Street, New York, NY 10018 | [info@peoplesforum.org](mailto:info@peoplesforum.org) | [peoplesforum.org](http://peoplesforum.org)





KSI BRISK

# SELLING SEX 'SAVED MY LIFE'

## NEW YORK COULD BE THE FIRST STATE TO DECRIMINALIZE PROSTITUTION

BY REBECCA CHOWDHURY

It was 2 a.m. and Joselyn Castillo was walking in the cold with her brother, rushing to pick up antibiotics because he was sick. They were on 93rd Street in Jackson Heights when they were stopped by the police.

"He told me I was loitering for the purpose of prostitution and that my brother, who was by my side, was my client," Castillo recounted in Spanish. "They asked for my ID, so I showed them my NYC ID. They said they didn't want this one but my real name — a man's name — on my ID from my country of origin."

Advocates fighting to decriminalize sex work here in New York State refer to moments like this as "walking while trans" and compare it to the Bloomberg-era practice of stop-and-frisk policing. Cops disproportionately target and harass trans women and "loitering" statutes are one of the tools in their arsenal.

When Castillo, an undocumented transgender woman from Guatemala, and her brother showed the officers their IDs, proving that they are in fact siblings, they were let go. Many are not so lucky.

Decrim NY, a coalition working to destigmatize the sex trade in New York State, is focused on repealing the loitering statute this legislative session, which Gov. Andrew Cuomo supports. In the long term, Decrim NY is advocating for the Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act. It would repeal laws associated with criminalizing sex work and clear the records of those who were previously convicted under these laws. While in New Zealand, sex workers successfully advocated for decriminalization in 2003, if the bill is passed, New York would become the first state to do so in America.

Castillo became a sex worker because she was unable to find work after her transition despite having experience in the service industry. This is not uncommon. A 2008 study of almost 700 transgender adults across the United States found that about 70 percent of respondents experienced some type of discrimination in the traditional workforce and 11 percent had participated in sex work.

"Many people ask, 'Why do you do it?' but we have to pay rent and taxes and survive," Castillo said. Sex work enabled her to financially support herself, as well as her brother in Guatemala who is now a college graduate with a steady job.

Opponents of decriminalization have formed their own coalition, New Yorkers for the Equality Model, and have clashed with Decrim NY at protests and other events. They support the repeal of laws that criminalize sex workers but they believe that sex buyers should be criminalized as

a way to decrease sex trafficking.

Referred to as the end-demand model, this approach has been implemented in countries such as Canada and Norway. It seeks to shrink the sex trade, which its proponents see as fundamentally exploitative.

TS Candii, a current sex worker and member of Decrim NY, counters that criminalizing clients "makes us more of a target" because it forces sex workers to accept lower pay and potentially worse working conditions.

(New Yorkers for the Equality Model did not respond to requests for comment.)

Like many LGBTQ youth, Candii became homeless as a teenager when she was abandoned by her family.

"When I started selling sex, it basically saved my life," she said. Activists fighting for the end-demand model are "just going off of biased feelings, judgements and morals."

While sex trafficking is distinct from consensual sex work between adults, the two are often conflated. The passage of federal anti-trafficking legislation in 2018 eliminated the various websites sex workers depended on to find clients who they could screen to avoid dangerous situations. Since then, sex workers have had their earnings seized and many have been pushed back onto the streets.

In New York, after an arrest sex workers are often sent to the Human Trafficking Interventions Court where they are referred to mandatory counseling programs to avoid jail time. The court has been criticized as ineffective and for conflating sex workers and victims of trafficking.

Decriminalization advocates in New York say their bill would only impact crimes related to sex work, leaving intact laws criminalizing human trafficking and making it easier to identify victims of trafficking.

Criminalization can carry grave consequences for immigrants. The NYPD and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) share information via federal databases that enable ICE to track and detain undocumented immigrants.

For Castillo, an arrest could result in deportation back to the very country she fled.

"More often than not, both trafficking victims and sex

workers are at risk of deportation the moment they are arrested," Esther K. of Red Canary Song, a group that supports grassroots organizing among Chinese massage parlor workers in New York City, wrote in an email to *The Independent*. She noted that anti-trafficking raids and arrests almost always directly lead to deportations. "The criminal system is not a safe harbor — it's a tool of the state to control and exercise power."

Decriminalization will allow massage parlor workers to turn to the police to report violent crimes or theft and eliminate fears that cops will charge them with sex work related offenses.

Tiffany Cabán, who ran for Queens district attorney on a platform of decriminalization, framed the issue around public health and safety at a February town hall where Castillo, Candii and Queens state Senator Jessica Ramos were also on hand.

"Queer lives are at stake here," said Caban.

Such was the case for Layleen Polanco, a 27-year-old trans woman, who died in Rikers Island while being held for sex work-related offense. Although officials were aware of her medical condition, she was placed in solitary confinement where she died of an epileptic seizure.

"I have had people ask me," said Sen. Ramos, a co-sponsor of the Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act, "what I would do if one of my sons were to become a sex worker? That to me is the wrong question. To me, the question is: if my son were to have to ever become a sex worker, how would he be safe?"

**WALKING WHILE TRANS:** Joselyn Castillo near where she was arrested for "loitering" by the NYPD.





# BAILING OUT ON REFORM

**A COALITION THAT INCLUDES BOND INSURERS, DAs AND RISK-AVERSE DEMS WANT TO PUT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE BACK IN JAIL**

BY PETER RUGH

The pews of Brooklyn Criminal Court's arraignment rooms at 120 Schermerhorn Street are packed with parents, wives, girlfriends, grandmothers — almost all of them African American or Latino. They wait, pensive, some in clothing usually reserved for a Sunday, some in whatever they were wearing when they rushed to the courtroom from home or work. Guards march their loved ones in and line them up behind a glass partition where they wait in handcuffs to stand before the presiding judge.

Once that happens, a harried public defender makes the case for the conditions of the defendant's release while their supporters watch on. Often, when it looks like the judge is leaning toward setting bail, the defense attorney might say something to the effect of, "Your honor, I've spoken to the defendant's parents and they can afford to make a \$500 payment if it comes to that. That is all they can afford."

On Feb. 14, a tall woman in a gray petticoat, stood in a hallway of 120 Schermerhorn, clutching documents handed to her moments earlier by a bailiff. The arresting officers with the 75th Precinct in East New York had laughed at Mame Diarra Sylla. For her, a small property owner and the mother of a college-age child, that was the most humiliating part of her ordeal. Nevertheless she was the image of composure. Until she wasn't.

"This is the second time I was improperly arrested for false allegations," she said, becoming tearful. "It's traumatizing not only to me but to my family, and it's costly."

Earlier that day, she had attempted to change the locks on her apartment. Sylla had a judge's order granting her possession of the flat but, seeing that the tenant, a relative of Sylla's, had a limited order of protection prohibiting her from talking to her, the arresting officers refused to look at Sylla's document. The conflict is one of those heated family disputes in which Sylla says her relative is using the courts against her. Law enforcement intervened and did what it knows how to do. Drag someone to jail.

Regardless, Sylla was grateful that she did not have to pay bail.

"The financial repercussions I'm sure would have been endless," she said. "My car would have been towed. I don't know what other expenses I might have accrued by being incarcerated. I probably wouldn't have been able to recover from it financially."

She and thousands of other New Yorkers like her are the beneficiaries of comprehensive bail reforms approved by the state legislature last year. The new law eliminates cash bail for most nonviolent crimes and in all cases requires judges to use the least restrictive means of ensuring defendants return for their next court appearance.

Now, a vocal coalition of police, prosecutors, corrections officers, and bail bond companies is pushing to roll back the reforms. Democratic lawmakers, including Senate Majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who passed the law a year ago are wavering. They want to amend the legislation to give judges more discretion, a maneuver critics warn will perpetuate the same economic and racial disparities in the justice system the original law is intended to fight.

Why the resounding backlash?

For one thing, cops, prosecutors, corrections officers — the loudest opponents of bail reform — need crime. They need criminalized populations. Their livelihoods depend on it.

What's more, the change is threatening to put the bond industry out of business across the state and it knows it. An examination of New York's lobbying database by the *Times Herald-Record* found that after the bail reform was first proposed two years ago, the bond industry spent \$150,000 on lobbying. That's more than it spent on lobbying and campaign contributions between 2009 and 2017 combined, according to data compiled by FollowTheMoney.org.

Corrections officer suddenly isn't such an in-demand profession either. The New York's jail population has dropped from about 21,000 on any given day, to 15,000 since the law was fully implemented in January. If you are serious about ending mass incarceration, these are outstanding developments, says Nick Encalada-Malinowski, Civil Rights Campaign Director at VOCAL-NY.

"Thousands, if not tens of thousands of people so far this year who have been arrested [have] come back to work, gone home, taken their kids



# BAIL

to school, have been able to pay rent and just live their daily life without having been put in jail and losing everything," he tells *The Independent*. "That's the true story. Then there are a few cases that have been out in the media that are saying this has all been really terrible. Those cases are very severe outliers."

Encalada-Malinowski is referring to a number of news stories that have been used to paint a picture of rampant lawlessness. Google "man released without bail" and you'll receive a deluge of these tales emanating from the New York press.

"Willie Horton still looms large in all of our memories," says Insha Rahman, Director of Strategy and New Initiatives at the Vera Institute of Justice, referencing the man whose crime spree after escaping prison via a furlough program in Massachusetts was used by George Bush Sr. to tarnish the state's governor, Michael Dukakis, his opponent in the 1988 presidential election. "That's the thing that we are realizing about criminal justice reform. Data and reason actually don't win the day. Fear and that gut, Willie Horton-esque narrative is what tends to carry the day."

The *Daily News* and the *New York Post* could find any number of stories like Sylla's. Instead, they are combing the city's criminal courts for just the opposite.

Rather than revealing flaws in the bail law, however, Encalada-Malinowski says "these cases are exposing the failure of the state and these counties to deal with other underlying issues like mental health care, like supportive housing."

In one story, headlined "Accused NYC serial burglar released again and again and again thanks to new bail law," a suspected Amazon package thief told the *News*: "I'm poor. I couldn't afford to pay no bail. I can't afford to eat."

Encalada-Malinowski points to another case from the pages of the paper. An alleged pickpocket with 138 arrests on his rap sheet who has been apprehended and released five times since the no-cash-bail law went into effect.

"To me that's a pretty big indication that arresting this man 138 times for petty crimes did not have the result that you wanted," he said.

Locking people up also poses a threat to public safety.

"Jails are very, very unsafe places," says Rahman. "These are places where people are sexually assaulted, where people are injured, where people lose not only their freedom but also their safety and their dignity. How many people are we willing to be allowed to be harmed in jail to avoid the one outlier case of somebody who's released and goes out and does something bad?"

If the reform were implemented in the Bronx — the poorest urban area in the country — when bail was set at \$3,000 for Kalief Browder in 2010, he might still be alive. Sixteen-years-old and accused of stealing a backpack, Browder spent three years in Rikers, two of them in solitary confinement. The case against him was eventually dropped for lack of evidence but he struggled with the emotional and psychological scars inflicted by his time behind bars. Two years after his release, Browder hung himself.

Were the reform in place during his arraignment, Browder "would have been able to have a [high school] graduation," his brother, Akeem, tells *The Indy*. "He would have been able to see my brother have his niece and nephew. He would have been able to be home with his family during birthdays. But instead, \$3,000 was a key factor in why he stayed in jail."

Akeem joined numerous civil rights campaigners and public defender organizations in advocating for the end of cash bail, as well as halting the practice of solitary confinement. Their efforts were aided by a slate of left-wing and socialist freshmen legislators, who arrived in Albany last year from Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and the Bronx and placed a sweeping package of criminal justice reforms high on their agenda. By the time it came to finalizing the state's budget at the end of March, they had not only secured bail reform's passage but also managed to axe a legal loophole that allowed district attorneys to withhold evidence from the defense up until the day before trial.

Now Democrats in more conservative districts are worried about mailers arriving on doorsteps this November accusing them of emboldening criminals. Andrew Gounardes, who managed to unseat a Republican incumbent, Marty Golden, in a 2018 race to represent South Brooklyn in the state Senate is co-sponsoring a bill that will allow judges to require mental health and substance abuse treatment as a condition of release. (He did not respond to requests for comment.)

Stewart-Cousins, meanwhile, is backing a proposal to amend the reform to grant judges more leeway in determining whether to set bail. This, however, has raised the specter that the racism inherent in the criminal justice system that the original law was intended to root out will be reintroduced. In determining whether to set bail, judges often rely on algorithms that measure the likelihood a defendant is a flight risk. These factor in a defendant's rap sheet over the past 10 years, which includes stop-and-frisk data, the Bloomberg-era policy of disproportionately searching young men of color without probable cause.

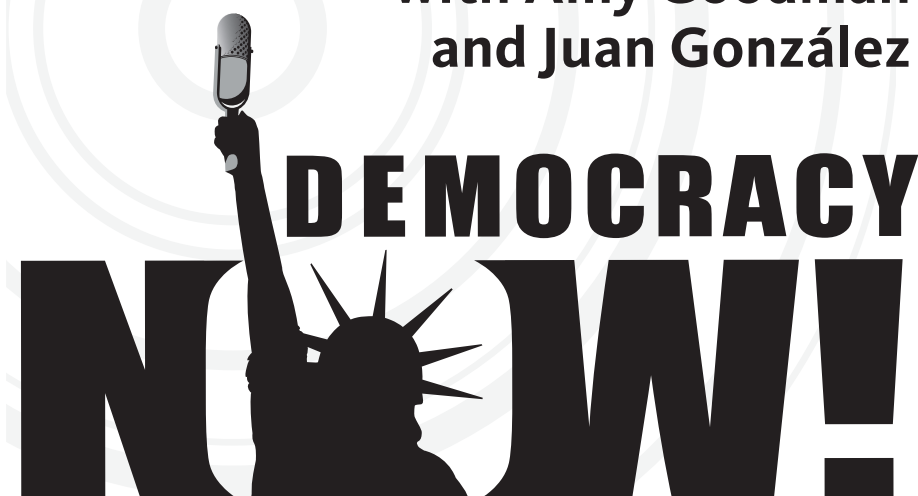
"The data that's used is biased and flawed and raises serious concerns about racial equity," Rahman says. "It's not an individualized consideration of a person. It's based on data for people that have a similar criminal history and background to you."

Some Democrats in the Assembly are reportedly lobbying the majority leader, Carl Heastie of the Bronx, to support Stewart-Cousins' measure. So far he has resisted efforts to roll back the reform but there are fears among advocates that he might cave to pressure, particularly when budget negotiations begin in earnest this March.

Akeem Browder, who met with Stewart-Cousins ahead of the original law's passage is aghast at her about-face. "She agrees to pass this bill and then turns her back on the public and is one of the main voices you hear in opposition" he says. "So you're basically saying you did something and you didn't know what you were doing and now you're going to take it back. You knew what you were doing."

"Everybody wants to be safe," Browder added. "But you don't keep a community safe by incarcerating that community."

## A Daily Independent Global News Hour with Amy Goodman and Juan González



### DEMOCRACYNOW.ORG

#### Tune In Live Every Weekday 8-9am ET

- Audio, Video, Transcripts, Podcasts
- Los titulares de Hoy (*headlines in Spanish*)
- Find your local broadcast station and schedule
- **Subscribe to the Daily News Digest**

Follow Us @ DEMOCRACYNOW



## FEMINIST APPROACHES VS. AUSTERITY

### Women's Status In Economy 25 Years After Beijing



### A Breakfast Meeting Featuring

Tuesday, March 10, 2020  
at 9:30am  
Instituto Cervantes  
211 E 49th St, New York, NY 10017

**Aliki Kosyfologou**  
**Oksana Dutchak**  
**Ursula Barry**  
**Cinzia Arruzza**  
**Barbara Adams**

This event is open to the public (no UN Pass required) and wheelchair accessible. A light breakfast will be served at 9:30am, the event starts at 10am. More information at [rosalux-nyc.org](http://rosalux-nyc.org)





# BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

## REBEKAH MERCER IS HISTORY

What's a climate change denier doing on the board of trustees at the American Museum of Natural History? That's a question the activist group Revolting Lesbians asked themselves two years ago as they launched a campaign to give Rebekah Mercer the boot. Mercer and her pop, hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer, have used their family foundation to funnel \$53 million to far-right groups, not to mention support Trump's campaign and the racist Breitbart "News" website. But they've also spread some of their dough around to buy a bit of prestige. According to a 2018 report from the *Guardian*, the museum took in \$4 million from the Mercers between 2012 and 2018. Amid pressure from Revolting Lesbians, the scientific community and the general public, Rebekah Mercer quietly opted not to seek another term on the board and her name was removed from the museum's list of trustees in February. Developer, Trump donor and NYC gentrifier Richard LeFrak remains on the board.

## BROKER FEES ARE BACK

A judge in Albany County Supreme Court has temporarily blocked a ban on the practice of forcing prospective tenants to pay broker fees. The restraining order comes in response to a lawsuit filed by the Real Estate Board of New York along with big brokerage houses, Corcoran and Douglas Elliman among them. REBNY and the brokers claim that the NY Department of State bypassed the legislature and "engaged in unlawful rulemaking" when it issued a guidance banning the fees. The guidance was issued to clarify sweeping rent law reforms approved in Albany last spring, which landlords and the real estate industry are fighting tooth and nail to undo. Brokers can still accept fees under the reforms, but the money has to come out of the landlord's pocket.

## BAN ON FACIAL RECOGNITION SOFTWARE PROPOSED

State Sen. Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) has introduced a bill that would ban the use of facial recognition software by law enforcement. Such software, Hoylman said in a statement, "threatens to end every New Yorker's ability to walk down the street anonymously. New York

## A BEAUTIFUL DAY: A push to nix

climate-denying Republican mega-donor Rebekah Mercer from the Natural History Museum's board paid off.

must take action to regulate this increasingly pervasive and dangerously powerful technology before it's too late." San Francisco and Somerville, MA have imposed similar bans.

## CUOMO WILLING TO SQUEAL ON IMMIGRANTS TO THE FEDS

In response to a new state law granting undocumented immigrants the ability to obtain drivers' licenses, federal authorities denied New Yorkers access to trusted traveler programs in February. The Feds want access to the state's DMV records before they'll let New Yorkers participate in programs that allow for swifter cross-border travel. NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has previously warned granting immigration authorities access to the DMV records would lead to mass deportations, has shifted his position, offering to provide the Feds with all the data they are asking for with the omission of one field: license holders' Social Security numbers.

## A WALL TRUMP DOESN'T LIKE

After Trump took to Twitter to mock a proposed seawall that would shield NYC from storm surges, the Army Corps of Engineers abruptly dropped a study aimed at combating the impact of climate change along the city's coast. The decision to cancel the project comes as storms like Hurricane Sandy promise to intensify and become more frequent. The seawall, one of multiple plans the corps explored, had also drawn criticism because it would not address stormwater runoff or rising tides. Nonetheless, advocates and city officials were stunned at the multi-year project's abrupt cancellation. "This just doesn't happen" to an in-progress study, Robert Freudenberg of Regional Plan Association told the *New York Times*. Research into addressing flood risks in New Jersey, Baltimore and Rhode Island has also ceased.



JOHN MILLER

# Tell Your Story at MNN!

At Manhattan Neighborhood Network, we're dedicated to programming for the community, by the community. That's where you come in.

Visit us for a free Orientation and learn how you can sign up for our low-cost classes in video production and editing!

Learn more about  
Manhattan Community Media  
at [mnn.org](http://mnn.org)



@MNNnyc



[twitter.com/MNN59](https://twitter.com/MNN59)



[facebook.com/mnn537](https://facebook.com/mnn537)



[youtube.com/user/MNN537](https://youtube.com/user/MNN537)

**MNN**  
Manhattan Neighborhood Network

Learn More at [MNN.org/Orientation](http://MNN.org/Orientation)

**Midtown Studios**  
537 West 59th Street  
212.757.2670

**El Barrio Firehouse  
Community Media Center**  
175 East 104th Street  
212.757.2670





CARRIE KLEIN

# PIPELINE PIPELINE PIPELINE PIPELINE PIPELINE

BY CARRIE KLEIN

In front of Victorino Cleaners on Moore Street, the pavement is jagged and cars are absent. Since April 2018, National Grid has been tearing up streets throughout North Brooklyn to install a 30-inch-wide, 36,000-foot-long fracked-gas pipeline.

Despite Mayor Bill de Blasio's announcement in January that the city will oppose new fossil fuel projects, construction continues. The pipeline, called the Metropolitan Reliability Infrastructure Project (MRI), will not, however, supply city residents with energy. It will instead transport natural gas to Long Island and Massachusetts. Nevertheless, it comes with a proposed \$185 million rate hike for National Grid's customers across the state over three years.

Meanwhile, business has dropped dramatically for shops along the pipeline's route, as workers carve its path from Brownsville to a depot in Greenpoint. Customers who can't park along the street are bringing their money elsewhere, says Lenin Hernandez, whose mother, Maria, owns Victorino Cleaners in Bushwick.

"It's hard," he says. "At the moment, there's nothing we can do."

Construction is set to continue into April and National Grid has not revealed any plans to compensate businesses for their losses.

On Sunday, Feb. 15th, demonstrators halted work on the pipeline, chanting, "Enough is enough!" They then marched to the Hernandezes' laundry to show their support for local shopkeepers opposing National Grid.

Encouraged by de Blasio's declaration, as well as Gov. Andrew Cuomo's denial of a permit for the Williams Pipeline — a 23-mile project that would carry natural gas under New York Harbor from Staten Island to South Brooklyn — local officials and environmental groups are hopeful MRI can be stopped too.

According to National Grid, the pipeline is necessary to provide energy reliably to New Yorkers, as well as maintain system pressure.

"What National Grid is not saying is that this pipeline is actually part of a much larger project," said Robert Wood, a climate activist with 350 Brooklyn, who noted the gas transported to the Greenpoint depot will

## NOT IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

*Opponents of the MRI pipeline and the rate hike it comes with are raising their voices.*

be loaded into trucks and transported out of the city.

New York City doesn't apparently have much need for the gas anyway.

Reports show that gas demand in New York City has been flat, if not decreasing, due to energy efficiency measures. And thanks to high temperatures this winter, National Grid hasn't used its backup energy supplies.

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed by the state legislature last year, commits the state to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent in the next 10 years and 85 percent by 2050. The City Council passed similar legislation last year as well.

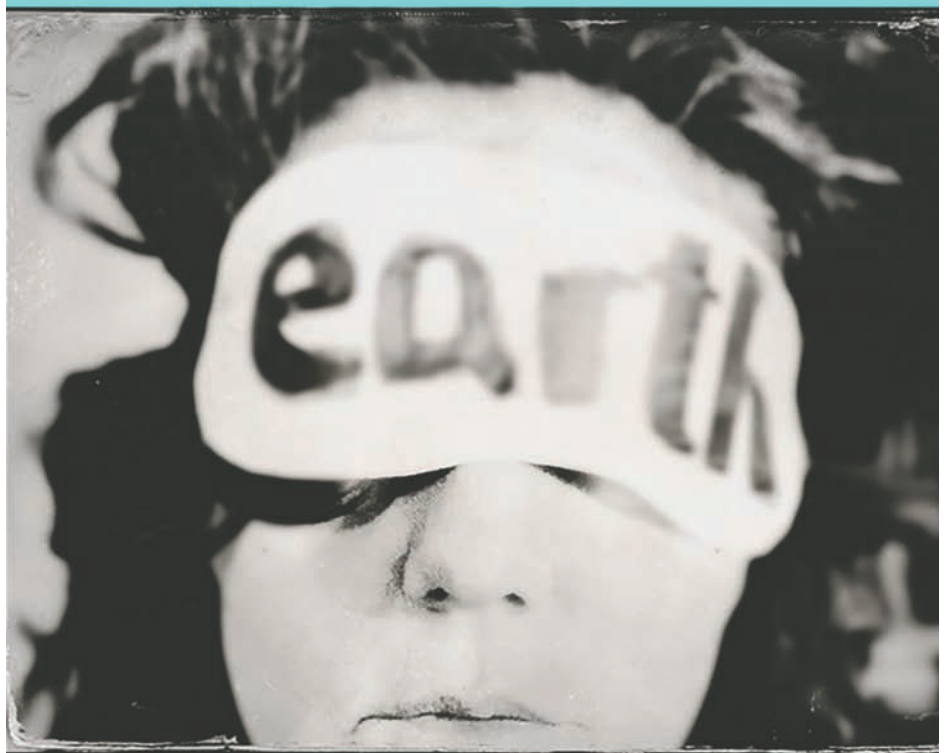
"These are huge milestones in the fight for climate justice and a huge vindication of the years of advocacy and pressure from climate activists all over the city," said Laura Shindell of Food and Water Watch. "But New York has set climate goals before and we've gone right past them. There's nothing to say we won't miss those marks again."

In January, the city approved a rate hike by Con Edison for pipeline expansions in the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan. "For them to approve of Con Ed's rate hike is climate denialism," said Lee Ziesche of Sane Energy Project.

National Grid has not carried out an assessment of greenhouse gas emissions for the MRI pipeline, a step required by the CLCPA. The company has a long history of malfeasance. In 2016, inspectors discovered that National Grid was potentially liable for over 1,616 state safety rule violations concerning a pipeline in Queens. Violations included workers cheating on qualification tests and faulty installations that led to gas leaks.

Brooklyn Community Board 1, which serves Greenpoint and Williamsburg, voted unanimously in opposition to National Grid's rate hike and is calling on Gov. Cuomo and the Public Service Commission to do the same.

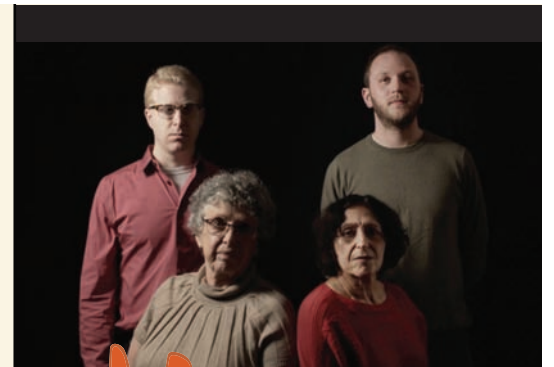
The commission is expected to vote in mid-March or April on the rate hike and National Grid's application to expand its liquified natural gas facilities. The regulatory body is made up of five people, all appointed by Cuomo. Environmentalists consider the vote a test as to whether the state is ready to commit to fighting fossil fuels.



## RADICAL LUNCH FRIDAYS 12-1 rsvp radlunch@revbilly.com

An evening of storytelling, offering a fresh way to grapple with our relationships to Israel/Palestine

We offer a safe space to explore views of Zionism from multiple perspectives



# Wrestling with Zionism

A READER'S THEATER

Conversations about Israel/Palestine can be difficult.

Often people stay away from the topic because they fear that any criticism of Israel will result in their being labeled anti-Semitic. A growing number of Jews and allies are part of a global movement for justice for Palestinians in and outside Israel, challenging Israel's human rights violations and the institutions that support them

Thursday March 19, 2020

6:30pm snacks, 7pm program

**Park Slope United Methodist Church**  
410 Sixth Avenue at 8th Street, Brooklyn NY

Free Admission

Subways: F, G to 7th Ave; R to 9th Street  
Event is NOT wheelchair accessible

Produced by Jewish Voice for Peace

Sponsored by Park Slope United Methodist Church Social Action Committee and Brooklyn for Peace



**BROOKLYN FOR PEACE**  
BROOKLYNPEACE.ORG

bfp@brooklynpeace.org | 718-624-5921

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:



@brooklyn4peace





TYRONE WALLACE

# WHAT IS THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

## FOR ONE THING, IT'S NOT DEMOCRATIC

BY DANNY KATCH

**T**he Democratic Party has been a perennial subject of hope, betrayal and befuddlement for so many on the left, in part because it's so hard to define. It can accurately be described as one half of the Republicrat cartel, a coalition of interest groups that alternately work together and against each other, a tool for co-opting the leadership of potential opposition movements and a loose electoral organization of the oppressed and exploited.

In recent years, the party's inner contradictions have sharpened to the highest degree since the early 1960s, when it contained both civil rights activists and the Jim Crow leaders who were murdering them. On one side, the Clinton-Obama leadership of recent decades has been a leading force for a free-market fundamentalism that Tariq Ali calls the "extreme center." On the other, the party has become home to the Bernie Sanders wing, part of an international revival of left social democracy.

So what exactly is the Democratic Party? It's a surprisingly difficult question.

"There are no formal membership dues and registration varies by state," wrote Matt Stoller of the Open Markets Institute after the Iowa fiasco raised uncomfortable questions about who's in charge of the organization people are hoping can stop Donald Trump. "Candidates can sometimes run for the party nomination without being a member. And that leaves out the actual mechanisms of governance, the think tanks, banks, corporations and law firms in which the various policy experts work as a sort of shadow government."

In place of any accountable structures, Stoller went on, there is merely a "blob" — an informal "network of lawyers, lobbyists, Congressional staffers, foreign policy experts, podcasters, media figures and pollsters who comprise the groupthink of the Democrats."

For many decades, the party's shapeless appearance inspired schemes of socialist takeovers that invariably ended with the insurgents adapting to the party far more than the other way around. It was with this history in mind that many on the left, myself included, were skeptical that Sanders could build on his shocking success in the 2016 primaries inside the party.

In the ensuing years, my concerns that shrewd party operators would swallow up and digest the new socialist movement have not come to pass. Instead, party leaders have watched helplessly as Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez use their party as a host body for an expanding colony of revived left social democracy. Being disappointed by the Democratic Party's impotence has never felt so good.

One factor allowing a socialist current to thrive within the party's vague boundaries for the first time in generations is the Republicans' complete abandonment of the center right. Republicans have been shifting rightward since the 1970s. The effect was to allow Democratic leaders to move in the same direction in their eternal pursuit of swing voters. But this dynamic has flipped with the emergence of a "Generation Left" that was shaped by the Great Recession, Occupy Wall Street, #BlackLivesMatter, and cohered by Sanders' 2016 run. The polarization produced by Republicans moving far right has made it harder for centrists to beat back the left with threats of defections to Republicans.

Now claims of "electability" that were long used to smother the left are falling flat in the face of polls that clearly show that Democratic voters of all stripes will certainly choose Sanders over Trump. Instead, it's main-

stream party figures who face a credibility crisis, as one supposed ideal candidate after another has been shot down by voters, leaving the very real possibility that the party's showdown for the Democratic nomination will be between two non-Democrats.

A contest between Sanders and Michael Bloomberg won't just highlight the Democrats' dilemma but exacerbate it by accelerating

the centrifugal forces pulling the party apart. Fear of socialist mob rule will push wealthy liberals closer to Bloomberg with his call for benevolent plutocracy, while the billionaire's efforts to buy the election will convince millions more of the necessity of "political revolution."

Incredibly, wonderfully, there is a legitimate chance of electing a president who will genuinely fight for policies of wealth redistribution and social justice. If he does, however, it will be inside a hostile party, discredited to many but bolstered by Bloomberg billions, which means the real fight will just have begun.

For all that's changed, one eternal truth about the Democratic Party is that it is not a democratic party. The constant attempts by unelected and unaccountable party insiders to subvert Sanders' campaign to win a fair fight for the nomination makes that crystal clear.

Ralph Nader recently expressed the hope many have that a Sanders win in November would by necessity be part of a broader Congressional change and alter the political dynamic in Washington.

"If Bernie wins the election against Trump, should he get the nomination, it has to be a massive surge of voter turnout, which will sweep out a lot of the Republicans in the Congress," said the consumer advocate and former Green Party presidential candidate. It could knock out the corporate Democrats and "reorient the Democratic Party to where it should be, which is a party of, by and for the people."

But even if such a "wave election" takes place, this assumption is based on a misreading of how the party works and who it works for. Its structure has undergone upgrades since the ancient days of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, but it essentially remains a pre-modern collection of various wealthy donors who come together around various candidates they believe can best pitch their financial interests to the voting masses.

Bernie Sanders and Michael Bloomberg each pose existential challenges to this setup, one through his unprecedented funding base of millions of small donors and the other through his equally unprecedented funding base of one donor.

Sanders' reliance on small donors creates the potential for a more democratic structure, as do Ocasio-Cortez's efforts to build infrastructure to support left-wing primary challengers. Important as these developments are, however, they don't alter the party's fundamental foundation, which is built around candidates and their funders, rather than membership democracy.

The concern isn't just that socialist office holders like Sanders and AOC need to be "held accountable" by their supporters. It's that democratic structures like platform-making party conferences with elected delegates are the only way a party can develop the thousands of grassroots leaders it needs if it wants to resist being overwhelmed by thousands of full-time lobbyists and nonprofit directors.

Current organizations with mass memberships and democratic structures that have endorsed Sanders, from the Sunrise Movement to Mijente to the Democratic Socialists of America, would have a key role to play in the process of building democratic structures. But the Democratic Party dwarfs them all in size and importance.

If Sanders becomes president he would have to try to democratize the Democrats as part of the fight to enact his agenda without disastrous compromises. If these efforts fail to redeem an irredeemable party, they could at least start a national conversation about the long-overdue creation of a legitimate U.S. socialist party.





BY ARIEL BOONE

Open, unapologetic discrimination against whole groups of people has been one of the hallmarks of the Trump administration. But it didn't begin with him. Here in New York, one of the leading candidates to replace Trump presided over a police state that invaded every corner of the local Muslim-American community. Linda Sarsour witnessed it first-hand. The Brooklyn-based civil rights activist and mother of three recently spoke with *The Independent* about her community's fight for inclusion and respect, her new book and whether people-powered movements or big money will ultimately prevail in this year's presidential election. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**THE INDYPENDENT:** *In your new book We Are Not Here to Be Bystanders: A Memoir of Love and Resistance, you write about clashing directly with Michael Bloomberg when he was mayor and the Coalition for Muslim School Holidays was pushing NYC to recognize Eid in schools. The environment was hostile for Muslim school-children at the time. Talk about why you were fighting for this, and what Bloomberg did.*

**LINDA SARSOOR:** As a product of the New York City public school system, having to choose between my faith and my education was something that I had to do every year. Becoming a mother myself and choosing to send my children to public school, I was committed alongside many parents to push the school system to recognize the two high holy holidays in the Islamic calendar.

This was not us asking New York City for any favors. It was about getting the type of recognition and inclusion and respect that our children in this public school system deserved. We did everything we needed to do. Petitions, press conferences, rallies, town hall meetings, op-eds in the newspapers. Every organizing tool we had, we used.

And Michael Bloomberg shut us down immediately. He was in a meeting sitting literally right across from me. He got up in the middle of the meeting and said, "I don't care what you do. I don't care how many petitions you gather. I'm just not going to do it."

Knowing the context of post-9/11 America, knowing those statistics of the high rates of bullying against Muslim children, nothing moved this man. We ended the campaign under his tenure, and we started it again in 2013 as a new administration was taking place.

*Because of him, it took nine years.*

In my book, I titled that chapter "Love Letter." It is a love letter to our children, to Muslim children. And the fact that

it took nine years for the city that many [Muslim children] were born and raised in to tell them that they were welcome, that they were included and respected in the public school system — it was heartbreaking as much as it was a victory when we actually won.

*You also write about the NYPD's infiltration and surveillance of mosques, social spaces, NYC neighborhoods, even campus groups. A journalist showed you a leaked confidential informant file showing that the NYPD tried to infiltrate the board of the Arab American Association while you were executive director. Do you credit Bloomberg with starting the NYPD surveillance?*

I don't know exactly the moment that it happened. What I do know is that the majority of the program was implemented under Mayor Bloomberg with his support. He has publicly, over and over again, justified the program.

As Muslim communities and our allies organized against the NYPD's surveillance and Mayor Bloomberg supported it, he was always on the defense. There was never a time where he said, "Let me reflect. Let me think about this and how it's impacting this community," even after a 2012 deposition by Thomas Galati, a chief intelligence officer at the NYPD, who said that this program produced zero leads.

We're talking about a program that impacted at least a million New Yorkers, over 250 mosques and hundreds of businesses, Muslim student associations and nonprofit organizations. It included taking pictures of the license plates of people who congregated at mosques and infiltration by "mosque crawlers," "rakers" and informants.

Not to make any judgment on whether his stop-and-frisk apology was sincere or not, because that's for black and brown people who were impacted by stop-and-frisk to say — but he hasn't even offered our community an apology.

*Bernie Sanders has broken out and become the Democratic frontrunner. Bloomberg is spending his way into the race and threatening to bombard the country with hundreds of millions of dollars in anti-Bernie ads. As a Sanders national surrogate, what do you think Bloomberg is doing in this race?*

My opinion as an observer, and of course as a supporter of one of the major candidates, is that he's not running against Trump, he's running against Bernie Sanders. That's very obvious from the attack ads that have been directed at Bernie and some of the language and rhetoric that he's used at the debates, his insisting that Bernie Sanders could not beat Donald Trump, his fear-mongering around words like socialism and this idea that Bernie is not good for the economy.

He's disrupting our democracy with his money. And more Americans need to be outraged about that.

Bloomberg is here to defeat and try to weaken Bernie as he gets to the Democratic National Convention. And at the end of the day, if we get to a brokered convention, that would be a disaster, because we will leave that convention splintered as a Democratic Party. Will we have enough time to heal to get to the general election and beat Donald Trump?

*So ultimately, what do you think is more powerful? Unlimited money and all the ads, endorsements and glowing corporate media coverage it can buy, or a people-powered movement?*

One of the reasons why I support Bernie Sanders is not necessarily because of Bernie as one human being. I support his movement. I see his momentum as an extension of the work I do every single day.

That's why it's so natural for me to be part of the Bernie Sanders campaign, because I don't have to change anything about myself. I'm still Palestinian. I'm still unapologetically Muslim. I unapologetically support marijuana legalization. I support criminal justice reform, immigrant rights and immigration reform. I support the dignity and sanctity of black life. I don't have to change anything that I believe to conform to a campaign, and that is why Bernie has the most momentum in this country.

And why do most Americans believe that he does, in fact, have the most chance of all the candidates to beat Donald Trump? It's because he has a movement behind him. And we're gonna be there with him. Even when he gets into the White House, I'm committed to being the protester-in-chief outside to make sure that we are holding Bernie Sanders accountable to the promises that he made our movements.

**FIGHTING AGAINST TRUMP, FIGHTING FOR BERNIE:** *Activist and Sanders surrogate Linda Sarsour.*





DAVID HOLLENBACH

# MAYOR OF LUXURY CITY

## MAYOR OF LUXURY CITY MAYOR OF LUXURY CITY MAYOR OF LUXURY CITY

By TOM ANGOTTI

Michael Bloomberg is running a stealth campaign for president, just like his run for New York City mayor in 2001. Then, a string of Democratic candidates were lined up to replace the term-limited Rudolph Giuliani. Bloomberg avoided public debates, secretly used his millions to win the allegiance of influential civic and nonprofit groups, and never challenged the media myths that claimed Rudy “cleaned up the city” and led the response to the 9/11 attacks.

Giuliani backed Bloomberg’s bid (after an unsuccessful attempt to use 9/11 as an excuse to postpone the election), and Bloomberg continued his most onerous policies, such as racially biased stop-and-frisk, giveaways to big developers and attacks on unions (including refusing to renew their contracts). Bloomberg used his strong ties to the media, and silenced his own media empire, to stifle any significant criticism. He said he would solve the city’s affordable-housing crisis — but it got much worse during his tenure as mayor, so it is hard to take seriously his claims that as president he would solve the nation’s housing crisis.

Bloomberg used his billions to buy three four-year terms as mayor, during which his aggressive land-use and housing policies advanced his vision of New York as the luxury city. He promoted hyper-gentrification and the displacement of working-class communities of color, and greenwashed it all by projecting himself as a global champion of environmental stewardship, with a little bit of environmental justice thrown in. He launched an ambitious “affordable housing” program, but it only fueled gentrification by favoring higher-income households.

Many liberals and progressives are falling for the Bloomberg hype that he’s the best alternative to Trump. But they really need to check out the billionaire’s record, which built on and supercharged Giuliani’s attacks on communities of color and labor, and understand how he worked intensely for Wall Street and real estate, using his billions to buy support from civic and community groups. Although Trump may be known for self-serving deals, Bloomberg used his personal wealth and private foundation to ad-

vance the interests of his corporate class.

### BLOOMBERG’S LUXURY CITY

After publicly declaring “if you have money, come to New York,” Bloomberg managed to rezone around 40 percent of the land in the city, stimulating luxury development and displacement in the lower-income communities of color that were coveted by real-estate investors, while at the same time protecting middle-income white communities. His policies stimulated gentrification and displacement. He faithfully held to the neoliberal credo that the only way to solve the housing problem was to incentivize private development and reduce government regulation. He ignored public housing’s huge capital deficit and proposed instead to build market-rate housing on some of Manhattan’s most coveted public-housing complexes (this was ultimately defeated by tenant opposition). At the same time, he poured billions of public subsidies into vanity real-estate projects like Manhattan’s Hudson Yards, where condos are now selling for upwards of \$50 million.

The myth is that Bloomberg can’t be bought because he’s a billionaire — but the real problem is that he does all the buying. His own private philanthropy, run by his domestic partner out of City Hall, shelled out payments to civic, charitable and nonprofit groups, explaining why many development deals sailed easily past divided communities. None dared call it corruption.

While Bloomberg dumped billions in public subsidies into megaprojects like Hudson Yards and quietly backed the state-sponsored Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn, he worked to convert the city’s public assets, schools and parks into public-private partnerships (with the public as the junior partner). While projecting the image of an efficiency-minded manager, he wasted billions on projects like the city’s failed bid for the 2012 Olympics, a stealth plan that would have triggered and subsidized extensive new real-estate development. He also appointed a corporate executive to head the city school system, challenging teacher protections, boosting charter schools and reinforcing inequalities.

On Bloomberg’s watch, Occupy Wall Street called attention to the huge gap separating the 99 percent and 1 percent when protestors took over Zuccotti Park, one of the city’s most prominent open spaces, that was a product of a lucrative public-private partnership.

### BLOOMBERG THE GREENWASHER

# DISAPPEARED IN QUEENS

## THE NIGHT STOP-AND-FRISK TOOK MY FATHER AWAY

By MOUMITA AHMED

It was 2002.

My dad was stopped and frisked on the subway. He fell asleep on the train, missed his stop, and was abruptly woken up by the conductor at the Jamaica-Van Wyck subway station and rushed out of the train to go use the bathroom. There were police officers watching him. They decided that his behavior was “suspicious” and immediately asked for his ID. A few moments later, he was arrested.

Was my dad’s crime that he missed his stop? Was it that he decided to use public transportation? What was so suspicious about someone running to the bath-

room?

We’ve all done that. But somehow this ordinary situation prompted police officers to detain him without probable cause. Their argument was they were looking for someone with my dad’s last name: Ahmed.

He was detained and wasn’t even allowed to make a phone call to his family for hours. We had no idea where he was.

After work he always came straight back to his home in Southeast Queens. He was never late. He never hung out with friends. It was like clockwork, every night, so when he didn’t come home that night, my mom was alarmed.

She didn’t speak English very well, so I had to call the police and translate the conversation on her behalf. They told us that they had to wait 24 hours before they could report him missing and go look for him.

That night, panicking, we went from hospital to hospital to see if unidentified bodies were admitted. All this stress because my dad fell asleep on a train and had to use the public restroom. All this stress because of his last name and the color of his skin. Bloomberg’s New York.

Eventually we received a call from my dad. He told us that he was stopped and frisked and detained in central holding. They gave him a lawyer. My uncle who had come over by then spoke to the lawyer and was told that my dad would get fined for “disorderly conduct” — an excuse to save face so the police wouldn’t look bad. We were told we could sue the NYPD and win but my parents were afraid to challenge authority because they are immigrants. They were almost happy to pay the fine as if it was some sort of a blessing that the outcome wasn’t worse.

I was only 12 years old when all of this happened and it left a mark on me.

I learned that justice costs money — especially when you’re poor. I was old enough to know that I wanted justice and was really angry at my family for not pursuing a lawsuit. I was old enough to know that what the police did was wrong and I wanted them to pay. I wanted to make sure no one else ever had to go through what my family went through. We were the lucky ones who got let off with a small fine, but others weren’t so lucky. Even at 12 years old, I knew that what happened was unfair.

A spark was lit in me that night. I knew that one day I would be older and would never allow this to happen to my family again. That night motivated me to directly challenge the system because I realized if we don’t fight for ourselves, nobody else will.

Now that I see Michael Bloomberg running for pres-

ident by spending millions of his own money on ads and buying up politicians and an endorsement from my Congressional representative, Gregory Meeks, I feel that same trauma all over again.

What happened to my family was actually one of the best-case scenarios. Stop and frisk was a nightmare for so many black and brown people in New York. Entire communities were harassed every single day. Some people were stopped and frisked multiple times a week simply because they looked “suspicious.” The traumatic situation I went through still impacts me to this day, almost two decades later. It was the moment where I thought that I lost my father for good.

If Bloomberg gets elected, I will never forgive the Democratic Party for allowing it.





JON SIMON/FEATURE PHOTO SERVICE FOR IBM

# WALL STREET WALL STREET WALL STREET WALL STREET WALL STREET WALL STREET

BY RICO CLEFFI

Though he is now pitching himself as the man to rein in Wall Street, Michael Bloomberg's efforts to deregulate the financial sector are as much a part of his legacy as stop and frisk. He fought efforts to curb the predatory lending practices that led to the 2008 financial crash and remained one of Wall Street's most vocal and influential defenders even as public sentiment turned against the banks through the Great Recession.

Bloomberg and Wall Street are inextricable. He is as much a creation of the American financial system as credit default swaps or derivatives — an arcane instrument that seems inexplicable to the layperson, yet somehow accrues money by the nanosecond.

The ninth-richest man on the planet got his start at Salomon Brothers, the brokerage that invented mortgage-backed securities. He became a billionaire by leveraging a rapidly changing technology to oversee the invention of his eponymous platform, known as "the Bloomberg Terminal," a computer system ubiquitous on Wall Street that provides consolidated, up-to-the-minute market information. (Despite Bloomberg being hailed as a genius for the terminal's invention, he has no background in computer programming, and histories of the machine exclude mention of programmers or designers.)

In the pre-Great Recession days of fast money backed by bad loans, Bloomberg was vocal about an existential threat: the prospect of New York losing its status as the world financial capital.

In November 2006, he penned a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed with Sen. Chuck Schumer on the importance of combating this looming threat to life, prosperity and The American Way. The NY pols argued that regulations were driving job-creating financial firms overseas, especially to business-friendly London. They declared that they were commissioning a report by the corporate consulting firm (and former Pete Buttigieg employer) McKinsey to analyze the problem and outline solutions.

The report, "Sustaining New York's and the US' Global Financial Services Leadership," commonly known as the "Bloomberg-Schumer Report," called for adopting a "principles-based" rather than a punitive approach to regulation. The ability of consumers and victims of fraud to sue banks and seek punitive damages against bankers needed to be scaled back. The 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, legislation that tightened accounting reporting procedures after the Enron scandal, needed to be scrapped.

The McKinsey researchers tapped close to 300 executives, as well as unspecified "investor, labor and consumer groups." The tone of persecution at the hands of an overzealous nanny state is predictable. One telling passage sums this up nicely: "Executives are by and large hesitant to raise even minor problems with regulators for fear that simply broaching the subject will lead to immediate enforcement action or, worse yet, a highly charged public prosecution."

An executive interviewed for the report is quoted as saying "executives are as afraid to outperform as to underperform." You could read this stuff and almost forget that this was the period when the Dow (and Wall Street profits) hit new records weekly.

Other suggestions made by the report included the establishment of an international finance zone in NYC, the formation of a public relations entity to advocate on Wall Street's behalf and limiting the amount of money banks are required to keep on hand.

The report also fretted over a loss of private equity firms and hedge funds to the U.K., and the overregulation of derivatives and mortgage-backed securities — two financial instruments that were major players in the stock market crash.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce followed suit with a report of its own, heavily referencing the Bloomberg-Schumer report, and declaring, "The reality is that America is no longer the sole capital markets superpower." The sentiments expressed in the original document became so prevalent that Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy echoed them while writing the majority opinion in the 2008 *Stoneridge Inv. Partners v. Scientific-Atlanta, Inc.* — a case that limited legal actions against firms partnered with companies engaged in fraud.

After the housing market disintegrated, and the economy crashed, Bloomberg doubled down. He immediately sprang to action defending the banks. The man who during his tenure in office refused to raise taxes on the rich was now making the argument that the financial sector's taxes fund schools, parks, and vital ser-

## BIG BUSINESS:

*Michael Bloomberg and Chuck Schumer (far right) argued for deregulating Wall Street but only Bloomberg persisted after the market crash.*

Continued on page 19



BLOOMDOGGLES

GARY MARTIN



# NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA NYCHA

BY MARIA MUENTES

I was a housing advocate when Michael Bloomberg took office in 2002. At the time, the New York City Housing Authority was considered the best public housing in the United States, a public-housing success story. By the time Bloomberg was done with his three terms, it was an unrecognizable and unmanageable mess.

The disrepair of NYCHA housing sits squarely on Bloomberg's head. He centralized the system of repair so that developments no longer had their own maintenance staff, but were forced to rely on a centralized citywide system. Instead of calling the complex's office, tenants had to dial a city call center. They were often given repair dates years into the future, with no remedy should workers simply not show up on that magic date.

One wonders if Bloomberg did this willfully, so that he could attempt, as he did during his last year in office, to have NYCHA sell off its lands to private developers.

His rezoning plans blighted the skyline with clumsy skyscrapers, grotesquely out of line with the small buildings surrounding them. These monstrosities often contained a tiny amount of "affordable housing," usually only a handful of apartments: He built more "affordable" apartments for households making more than \$100,000 than for those making less than \$30,000. These crumbs were nothing compared to the secondary displacement that occurred by bringing in people whose incomes dwarfed that of longterm neighborhood residents.

Bloomberg changed the look and the feel of New York. Neighborhoods like Harlem that had high historical importance and deep roots for African Americans became unrecognizable, full of chain stores and restaurants clearly not meant for the residents. Entire buildings were evicted with no response from a mayoral administration that always sided with money. In historically Latino neighborhoods like the Lower East Side and East Harlem, bodegas were shuttered, replaced by luxury towers, chain stores and chain supermarkets like Whole Foods and Trader Joe's.

His multilayered approach to displacement decimated communities of color in New York City. Stop-and-frisk made black and Latino residents second-

class citizens who could be "thrown up against a wall," as Bloomberg recommended. Apartments became unaffordable and shelters offered no assistance for people to access permanent affordable housing. Public housing became virtually unlivable. Luxury towers with rents starting at around \$3,500 further

signaled to entire communities that this city is not for them. Several volumes can be written about how Bloomberg harmed New York City public schools though that is another story. One aspect of it is how he closed large high schools and replaced them with several small themed high schools, thereby erasing part of New York City's cultural history. Communities with deep roots saw their schools, their businesses and their imprint erased in favor of institutions that only serve the wealthy.

His appointments to the city Rent Guidelines Board guaranteed the highest politically acceptable rent increases possible for rent-stabilized tenants year after year. He fought against raising the minimum wage, ensuring that working-poor people could not keep up with escalating rents.

The number of people staying in city homeless shelters, mostly families with children, almost doubled under Bloomberg. Asked why the shelter population was so high, he quipped that people were having "a much more pleasurable experience than they ever had before" in the shelter system and therefore were intentionally remaining homeless.

His signature policy to aid homeless families was Advantage, which paid rent for homeless families, if they moved out of a shelter into a privately-owned apartment — but only for two years, under the absurd notion that people with working-poor jobs would miraculously become able to afford New York rents within that time. Bloomberg was politically fortunate that the state pulled the funding just as people were beginning to realize what a failure it was.

Those of us who saw our once diverse and eclectic city devolve into luxury skyscraper hell under 12 years of Michael Bloomberg find ourselves in the unenviable position of trying to explain to people in the rest of the country just how bad he was once again.





# THE KIDS DIDN'T MATTER

**BUT "SCHOOL REFORM" SURE WAS A BONANZA FOR GRIFTERS**

BY LEONIE HAIMSON

**A**s of mid-February, Michael Bloomberg had spent over \$400 million on his presidential campaign, buying his way to being a leading contender for the Democratic nomination. While his record on issues such as racial policing has drawn significant criticism, his record on education has been glossed over.

During his 12 years as mayor, Bloomberg and his school chancellors embodied an aggressive free-market ideology, autocratically imposing changes with little concern for how they were upending the lives of communities, students and teachers.

When he first ran for mayor in 2001, he pledged to lower public-school class sizes to 20 students or less in kindergarten through third grade. But his administration misused hundreds of millions of dollars in state aid earmarked for that purpose. By the end of his third term in 2013, class sizes in the early grades had risen to the highest levels in 15 years. More than 300,000 public-school students were in classes of 30 or more.

In a 2011 speech, Bloomberg said that if he had his way, he would double class sizes by firing half the teachers, "weed out all the bad ones" and pay the rest more, claiming that this would be a "good deal

*Continued on page 19*

## A TEACHER'S STORY

**HOW BLOOMBERG WREAKED HAVOC ON MY 'A-RATED' PUBLIC SCHOOL**

*Our community found itself at the epicenter of the fight to protect and preserve public education, while also fighting for the real reforms that would improve our schools.*

*High-stakes testing, co-locating charters with well-performing schools and attacking teachers' unions, all while cutting funding to and closing our public schools.*

BY JULIE CAVANAGH

**O**n a cold January day nearly 10 years ago, I found myself walking up and down East 79th Street in Manhattan, home to the private residence of then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg. I walked alongside parents, children and educators from across our city, all



holding personal stories close to their hearts about how Bloomberg's policies ravaged their schools and communities.

My school, PS 15 in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood, was the place I had called home since 2001. Our school was, and remains, a community committed to educating the whole child; responsive to the children and families we serve. It has a rich history, including surviving the crack epidemic in the 1980s and the loss of its beloved principal, Patrick F. Daly, to gun violence in 1992, while he was searching for an absent student in a housing project nearby. We were an "A" school by Bloomberg's own measures and we were recognized for closing the achievement gaps for both economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

Yet all that offered no protection when our school became one of the first targets for a "co-location," installing a charter school in the same building as a public school. This wasn't just any charter school. It was an education corporation run by Spencer Robertson, the son of hedge fund billionaire Julian Robertson. The elder Robertson had donated generously to Bloomberg's education initiatives and was, like the mayor, a national player in promoting the corporate school "reform" agenda — pushing high-stakes testing, co-locating charters with well-performing schools and attacking teachers unions, all while cutting funding to and closing our public schools.

While Bloomberg sent his own children to lavish private schools that downplayed testing and boasted of experienced educators and small class sizes, he mounted propaganda campaigns, promoting myriad destructive policies for public schools, including dismissing the benefits of small class size and experienced educators, expanding charter schools and slashing school budgets. The New York State legislature essentially gave him free rein for all this when it approved mayoral control of city schools in 2002.

Our school community soon found itself at the epicenter of the fight to protect and preserve public education, while also fighting for real reforms. After a struggle that included suing for the right to protest on Bloomberg's East 79th Street block — which the mayor had deemed a no-First Amendment zone (we lost the case when a federal appeals-court judge mysteriously retracted his decision in our favor) — we fended off the charter-school invasion of our building.

It was not a clean victory, however. The charter left our building with the help of \$26 million allocated in capital funds to build its own school in Red Hook. In Bloomberg's 12 years as mayor, more than 200 public schools were either closed or had charters co-locate with them.

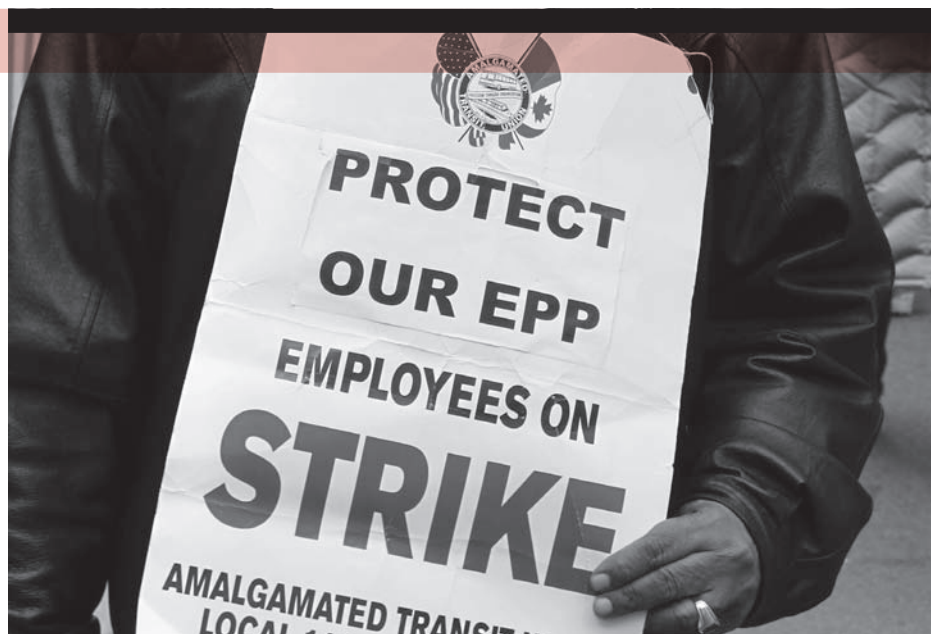
Today, both public elementary schools in Red Hook struggle under the weight of Obama-era corporate school "reforms" that Bloomberg advocated. Insufficient funding and a host of imposed-from-above policies by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) hinder our ability to provide what we know and research tells us would most benefit our students and community. This is also Bloomberg's legacy.

A city DOE official told me a few years into Bill de Blasio's term that they likened Bloomberg's legacy to a rotting onion. Just when they thought they had peeled back enough layers to begin making progress, another rotten layer would reveal itself. Bloomberg didn't just impose policies that hurt our public education system. He created an apparatus that made it nearly impossible to reverse those policies. A President Bloomberg would no doubt imprint these failed and harmful initiatives nationally.

Like Donald Trump, Bloomberg believes his money elevates his worth and knowledge. Like Trump, Bloomberg has no problem using his power to impose unpopular and harmful policies on communities he does not live in. Like Trump, Bloomberg would use his money and power to use and abuse his office at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and would put forth a vision and plan that benefits the wealthy and those who fervently believe in market-driven policies and practices. Unlike Trump, Bloomberg has the money, power and experience to get much more done. That terrifies me.

From his perch on 79th Street, Michael Bloomberg, currently the eighth richest man in the world, terrorized communities like mine and imposed market-based systems where they have no place. We cannot allow the fear of Donald Trump, and quite frankly, a fear of Bernie Sanders among some Democrats, to lull us into the idea that a Bloomberg presidency would bring anything but a continued nightmare for those who need change the most.

*Julie Cavanagh is an assistant principal at PS 15 in Red Hook, Brooklyn. She previously served as a special education teacher at PS 15 from 2001 to 2017*



## HOW TO BREAK A UNION

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

One of the most telling episodes of Michael Bloomberg's 12 years as mayor is one of the least known: In February 2013, he broke a strike by 8,000 school-bus workers and crowed that he'd crushed "the special interests."

The strike involved drivers, attendants and mechanics at the private bus companies the city hires to provide transportation for field trips and for the mostly disabled pupils who can't walk or take a bus or subway to school. Since the late 1970s, their contracts with the city had included "employee protection provisions," that mandated that if it replaced a bus company, the new one had to hire the old company's workers in order of seniority and at the same wages and benefits.

In January 2013, Bloomberg announced that he would not include those provisions in upcoming bus contracts, saying they cost too much and impaired competition. He refused to negotiate with the workers' union, Amalgamated Transit Union 1181. They went on strike.

Drivers then started at \$14 an hour and reached \$29.63 after six years on the job. Attendants started at \$11 and maxed out at \$15.93. They did 10-hour shifts, with overtime pay after 10½ hours. "Bloomberg wants us to work like part-time workers, with no benefits," driver Juana Cruz said on a picket line on a below-freezing morning near City Hall.

After a month of surviving on \$90 a week strike pay with no hope of budging him, the union called off the strike, hoping that the next mayor would be more sympathetic.

"In the city's entire history, the special interests have never had less power than they do today," Bloomberg responded. "The end of this strike reflects the fact that when we say we put children first, we mean it."

He was talking about people who got up at 5 in the morning and gave their cell-phone numbers to autistic kids' parents. Their "special interest" was wanting to keep their jobs and make \$14 an hour instead of \$8.

Local 1181 President Michael Cordiello told WBAI radio four months later that as a result, "2,000 of my members have lost their jobs, because the work went to low-bidding companies." He told a state budget hearing in 2017 that the low-bidding companies paid "barely above the minimum wage, minimal or no health-care coverage, and no pensions."

By then, with Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration handling bus contracts, about three-fourths of city school-bus workers had employee-protection provisions, but about 2,000 didn't. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has twice vetoed legislation that would require the protections, once in 2016 and once in 2019. "The inclusion of these provisions is both anti-competitive as well as cost-inflating," Cuomo wrote in his veto memo last December.

Bloomberg's contempt for organized labor was not confined to bus workers. After demanding a wage freeze in 2009, he effectively imposed one by refusing to negotiate contracts for the next four years with any of the roughly 150 unions representing city workers, from accountants to zookeepers. He announced in 2013 that he wanted to reach deals, but only if they didn't include retroactive pay and forced workers to pay more for health care—and, in a characteristically nanny-state twist, to switch to health plans that encouraged them to quit smoking and lose weight. That December, he said the expired contracts gave mayor-elect de Blasio the power "to negotiate historic reforms," such as cutting pension and health benefits.

The de Blasio administration had to negotiate contracts retroactive to 2010—and to 2008, for teachers and transit workers. It took almost three years to complete those deals.

Bloomberg also vetoed a 2012 bill that would have set a "living wage" of at least \$11.50 an hour on projects that received more than \$1 million in public funds, and a year later, one that would require employers with at least 15 workers to give them up to five paid sick-leave days per year.





# KEEPING THE PEOPLE IN LINE

## MAYOR MIKE & THE 2004 RNC

BY ERIC LAURSEN

The 2004 Republican National Convention was just days away when I got back home from an organizing meeting on a hot August night in Brooklyn. I turned on the TV to watch *Nightline*, and there was New York Police Commissioner Ray Kelly being interviewed by Ted Koppel about the city's preparations for the convention — and the anti-RNC protests that were expected to attract hundreds of thousands of activists.

Kelly was explaining to Koppel's national audience that the police had reports of "violent threats" against the convention. Suddenly, a series of mugshot-style photos flashed across the screen. One of them was mine.

More pictures streamed by, including those of other organizers I knew and had worked with. Kelly explained that these photos were of people the NYPD was keeping an eye on — presumably, because we were somehow connected with those "violent threats."

Once I got over the shock of having my privacy invaded in this way — I still debate with myself whether the NYPD was more to blame than ABC, which allowed itself to be used to smear individuals whose names it didn't even know — I compared notes with other activists. One friend was harassed in his home by an FBI agent. Others were tailed to and from their residences. In the days that followed, so was I. Later, we learned that law enforcement had been infiltrating activist groups all over the country that were planning to be at the convention.

The RNC in NYC was, in part, the brainchild of Republican Mayor Mike Bloomberg — now Democratic presidential candidate Mike Bloomberg — and his friends in the upper

reaches of the city's real estate aristocracy. They had hoped the event would pull in tourist dollars and, not so incidentally, showcase Bloomberg's great ambition to redevelop what he called Midtown West, complete with a new football stadium. Instead, Kelly's NYPD went on a rampage, "kettling" thousands of marchers on their way to the Garden and depositing hundreds on a fetid pier off the West Side Highway; they were held there and in overcrowded jail cells, sometimes for days — until the convention ended and its well-heeled attendees dispersed.

Ten years later, the city paid a record \$18 million to settle a civil rights claim involving more than 500 protesters who were rounded up and detained, generally with no evidence that they had violated the law in any way. The city had earlier settled other, separate claims, bringing the total price tag for the NYPD's misbehavior to some \$34 million.

By that time, Ray Kelly was no longer police commissioner — he had left to become head of "risk management" for real estate developer Cushman & Wakefield — and Bloomberg was no longer mayor. But the pair had continued to defend the city's manner of hosting the RNC and the tactics of their police. In 2011, they again demonstrated their penchant for using brute force against political protest when they violently evicted Occupy activists from Zuccotti Park. Two years later, the city paid more than \$365,000 to settle a lawsuit brought by people whose property was destroyed in the nighttime raid.

The past doesn't go away, of course, and Bloomberg has had to answer tough questions about the policies of his police, particularly their tactic of stop-and-frisk, which at its peak touched nearly 686,000 people just in 2011. Other aspects of his close partnership with Ray Kelly, including the RNC debacle, haven't been scrutinized as closely, because Kelly, not Bloomberg, was the public face of law enforcement. But they deserve a closer look for what they tell us about Bloomberg's probable behavior in the White House.

When he became mayor, in January 2002, it was the end of the Giuliani era. Crime had fallen dramatically in New York and the NYPD were happy to take full credit. The police were politically untouchable and the new commissioner, Ray Kelly, who had served earlier, from 1992 to 1994, was its savviest boss in decades. Bloomberg knew better than to challenge him, and Kelly quickly staked a claim as the most powerful political figure in the city.

It helped that they saw eye to eye on just about everything. In the wake of 9/11, they agreed that New York needed to start surveilling and infiltrating suspect political

and religious groups again, and sought and received court approval to do so. Muslim groups in the city and suburbs received especially close attention. The NYPD also installed some 3,000 surveillance cameras in downtown and midtown Manhattan, making New York a pioneer "smart city" — i.e., a pathbreaker in digitally enabled metropolitan privacy evisceration.

Bloomberg has never had a problem with any of this, just as he had no discernible problem with his police commissioner's strong-arm tactics during the RNC. When they received court approval for stepped-up investigations of political groups a year before the convention, Kelly argued for it on the grounds that "we live in a more dangerous, constantly changing world." Bloomberg, during his last year as mayor and just after the Boston Marathon bombing, virtually parroted Kelly, saying, "The people who are worried about privacy have a legitimate worry. But we live in a complex world where you're going to have to have a level of security greater than you did back in the olden days, if you will. And our laws and our interpretation of the Constitution, I think, have to change."

There are many grounds to be concerned about a Bloomberg presidency, especially his naked intention to checkmate any deviation from the neoliberal economics that helped make him rich. But his conduct around the RNC raises three other critical concerns: first, his disdain for individuals' civil rights when it interferes with his grander schemes; second, his openness to new methods of social control in the name of security; and third, and possibly most important, his dereliction of duty in blindly following the lead of people in uniform when either the first or second of these matters comes up.

Put these all together, then imagine Bloomberg in charge of an executive-branch apparatus that includes the Pentagon, the CIA, the NSA and the FBI. When I try, I'm reminded of that night in 2004 when I saw my face on TV and Bloomberg's top cop darkly warning America about activists and "violent threats."

*Eric Laursen, an activist and independent journalist, was a media outreach organizer with the citywide coalition against the 2004 RNC.*

**PEACEFUL PROTEST:** *Activists participate in a die-in during the 2004 RNC, while their future jailers look on.*



## WALL STREET

*Continued from Page 14*

vices. Clamping down on bad financial actors would only lead to the banks leaving.

The mayor, who the New York Times referred to as “perhaps the foremost defender of the financial industry in the political world” made essentially the same argument corporations always use when faced with potential regulations — play by our rules, or we’ll leave town.

Bloomberg even lit into his old pal Schumer, expressing dismay at the senator’s unwillingness to defend Wall Street vigorously enough. He uttered no words of sympathy for the millions of Americans who lost their homes, including thousands of black and Ca-

ribbean constituents in Brooklyn and Queens. Instead, he publicly chastised President Barack Obama.

“The bashing of Wall Street is something that should worry everybody,” the mayor said as Obama was scheduled to visit NYC to give a speech arguing for financial reform. Bloomberg ramped up the rhetoric as the president’s visit drew closer, declaring of the banks, “We’re on their side,” and, as if there was any ambiguity, he added later: “We love the rich people.”

As for the victims of the crisis, Bloomberg, in an interview with Israeli outlet Globes, laid the blame squarely on greedy Americans lured by the prospect of unearned things they couldn’t afford.

“Sure, let’s get out the guillotine, there must be someone who’s corrupt,” he said sarcastically. “Let’s forget, for a moment, my role, the citizen who bought a home I couldn’t afford, who took a vacation I couldn’t

pay for, or who bought myself a boat when I didn’t really have the money for it. It’s you, ‘the rich guys,’ not me, the citizen, who lived beyond his means.”

Bill de Blasio would later run his “Tale of Two Cities” campaign against the New York Bloomberg ushered in, a city he referred to as a “luxury product.” As Bloomberg’s final term drew to a close, a Politico headline noted, “Wall St. misty as Bloomberg departs.”

The billionaire mayor is trying to reinvent himself like so many toxic assets to be dumped on the public, repackaged as an alternative to the madness of Trump. It would be delusional for the rest of us to allow him to get away with it.

## CLASS STRUGGLE

*Continued from Page 16*

for the students.” (He didn’t mention that his daughters attended a private school where class sizes averaged 14 to 18 students.)

He and his chancellors also based whether students would get promoted, teachers would keep their jobs and schools would stay open largely on standardized test results.

He began having schools hold back third-graders solely on the basis of low test scores, and expanded that to students up through eighth grade. But his administration ended that policy several years later, after the city Department of Education confirmed the skeptics’ predictions that it would lead to higher dropout rates.

In 2007, Bloomberg implemented merit pay for teachers, again based on students’ test scores. That was abandoned four years and \$52 million later, after several independent studies found it ineffective in raising achievement.

The same year, his administration began giving all schools grades of A to F, with 85% of the grade based on the year’s test-score gains. That was so erratic that several schools which received a failing grade one year received stellar grades the following year.

His administration also began rating teachers on “value added”: annual test score gains. Though Deputy Chancellor Chris Cerf made a deal with then-United Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten to keep those ratings private, the DOE broke this agreement in 2010, when Chancellor Joel Klein asked reporters to file Freedom of Information requests to release them—leading to teachers’ names and evaluations being published in all the city’s major daily newspapers.

In many cases, the underlying data itself was faulty, based on test scores of students who had never been in these

teachers’ classes. In one instance, a teacher was rated by scores from when she was out on maternity leave.

Klein had promised teachers that the ratings would be used only diagnostically, and not for formal job evaluations. But in 2009, Bloomberg demanded that principals rely on them to decide which teachers would be granted tenure.

His overemphasis on high-stakes testing exacerbated stratification and segregation across the system. He also closed or phased out more than one hundred schools that enrolled largely black and low-income students. At the same time, hundreds of small schools opened, many of them funded by the Gates Foundation, that at first refused to enroll any students with special needs or immigrant children still learning English. They later became less openly exclusionary, but still screened students on grades, test scores, and family involvement.

This further destabilized many of the larger, unselective high schools that remained open, as they became even more overcrowded with high-needs students, many of them recent immigrants.

Under Bloomberg, the number of specialized high schools that based admissions solely on one test rose from three to eight. At Stuyvesant, the city’s most selective high school, the number of black students admitted fell from 109 in 2000 to only seven out of 958 in 2010.

A core aspect of his education policy was encouraging the growth of privately run charter schools, which increased from 19 to 183 while he was in office, drawing more than a billion dollars out of the DOE budget. Bloomberg and charter-school supporters on Wall Street successfully lobbied to have the state’s charter cap raised twice, in 2007 and 2010.

The city spent hundreds of millions of dollars to build charters separate facilities. More frequently, it gave them space inside public-school buildings for free. This often forced those public schools to lose their libraries, art or music rooms, and limited their students’ access to the

lunchroom or gym.

The charters tend to enroll far fewer of the neediest students, including immigrants learning English, students with severe disabilities, and homeless kids. Many had “no excuses” disciplinary policies, featuring high rates of suspension and teacher attrition.

Though test scores initially rose during Bloomberg’s administration, this increase was eventually proven to be illusory, based on the exams and their scoring becoming easier. When the test score bubble burst in 2010, scores fell sharply.

The Bloomberg years also featured reckless overspending on outside vendors, products, and consultants. In 2009, the Panel for Educational Policy rubber-stamped a \$54 million contract extension with a consulting group called Future Technology Associates, even after Daily News reporter Juan Gonzalez exposed how the company had no offices, no other apparent customers, and was using foreign workers brought in on temporary visas who were being paid one-fourth of what DOE was being charged. Two years later, a special investigator’s report revealed that the contract had been arranged by a high-level department official who was romantically involved with the company’s co-owner.

The greatest waste occurred with two student data systems. The ARIS data dashboard system was launched in 2007, and cost nearly \$100 million before it was ditched in 2014. The SESIS special-education data system, which cost \$130 million, was so dysfunctional that it could not be relied upon to provide accurate information about which students were receiving their mandated services. It was also so riddled with glitches that it took hours for teachers to input the data.

Bloomberg arrogantly dismissed critics. In 2007, he compared the UFT to the National Rifle Association. “You always do have the problem of a very small group of people who are single-issue focused having a disproportionate percentage of power,” he said. “That’s exactly

the NRA.”

“You’re either with our children, or against our children,” he added.

In 2011, he appointed Cathie Black, a wealthy magazine publisher, to succeed Joel Klein as schools chancellor. Though she had no experience in education, as generally required by state law, Bloomberg’s attitude was that she didn’t need any, because she’d been a successful manager. Parents were outraged.

“It just goes to show they have no understanding whatsoever of what the job is,” he responded. “This is a management job.”

“He tends to act as though the schools belong to him as an extension of his personal household and that he rules as lord of the manor, a lord whose decisions are never to be questioned,” education expert Diane Ravitch wrote after Black was ousted barely three months later.

There is little evidence that Bloomberg has changed his views. In 2014, his political action committee spent at least \$2.3 million on ads to re-elect Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, praising him for his support of charters. He spent more than \$15 million on pro-charter candidates and organizations in Louisiana, more than \$4 million in California, and \$490,000 in support of a failed 2016 effort to expand charters in Massachusetts.

Though he hasn’t yet released his education platform, campaign spokesman Stu Loeser told the New York Post in January that it “will absolutely promote charter schools. The record number of charter schools opened under Mayor Bloomberg is clear.”

The last thing the nation’s public schools need is to exchange one imperious billionaire in the White House for another.





# LEARNING FROM THE MEXICAN BERNIE SANDERS

## AS CONTRADICTIONS INTENSIFY, LÓPEZ OBRADOR NAVIGATES TRICKY POLITICAL TERRAIN

BY LAURA CARLSEN

When Andres Manuel López Obrador was inaugurated as president of Mexico in December 2018 following a landslide election victory, progressives were euphoric. The new president's party, MORENA, won a simple majority in both houses of Congress and it looked like nothing could stop the progressive agenda — dubbed “The Fourth Transformation” — from boldly moving forward. Mexico stood out as a beacon amid the rightwing backlash that had taken hold in Latin America.

Just over a year into his presidency, López Obrador (or AMLO as he is widely known) still has nearly five years to carry out his sweeping agenda, but the view from inside the country reveals a telling mix of advances, obstacles, limitations and setbacks. The difficulties in carrying out promised reforms to end neoliberalism, reduce violence, lift millions out of poverty and attack corruption demonstrate some of the challenges for left-wing governments in today's globalized world, while the internal contradictions raise the question of what it looks like when progressive ideals meet the pragmatic realities of governing.

Generalizing between national and political contexts is risky, but Mexico can provide an ongoing case study for progressive candidates positioning themselves in the U.S. elections, and also for the people who support their agendas. Here are some lessons so far, from both successful strategies and contradictions that have caused political blowback.

### LESSON #1: USE, DON'T LOSE, YOUR BASE.

Opposition to a left government got downright vicious during AMLO's three presidential campaigns. Now, entrenched powers have become even more organized and sophisticated in their relentless attacks on social media, in the press and behind the scenes. AMLO touched nerves with his vows to root out corruption — a way of life for business and for Mexican politicians whose motto was “a politician who is poor is a poor politician” — and end the neoliberal economy that created billionaires, privatized public goods and services, and generated millions of impoverished Mexicans and emigrants.

National and international capitalist interests are reluctantly working with the new government, but many are looking to exploit any opportunity to weaken it. For Mexico's conser-

vative press, for the opposition parties and for powerful business groups, the administration's every misstep or poor result opens up a flank attack.

AMLO's response has been the same as his campaign strategy: to build a popular base that identifies with and defends his political project. It's not the same to ask for a vote as it is to ask for a population to mobilize to support a long-term political transformation. López Obrador was elected with 53 percent of the vote, more than double his closest opponent. In January 2020, he had a nearly 70 percent approval rating. His popularity can't be attributed to results — the economy contracted in his first year and violence remained high. It's his rapport with his base that explains his popularity.

President López Obrador maintains constant communication with his supporters through broadcasted daily press conferences, which are aimed at them rather than the press, and weekend visits to cities and villages across the country where direct contact reaffirms his man-of-the-people image. His colloquial speech and the way he explains the moral more than political premise of his government's actions have kept people involved. This high level of support weakens powerful critics, who so far have been unable to cause significant defections from the AMLO ranks.

### LESSON #2: KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER.

López Obrador's progressive reforms face dangerous enemies, namely national and international capitalist interests, and the Trump administration. One could add the dethroned political elite, but after a series of neoliberal administrations that treated governing as a private business venture, it's already included in the first category.

AMLO knows his enemies could disrupt his plans or even stage a coup against his government. His strategy has been to coddle them. The most surprising enemy-as-friend is Donald Trump. Mexicans universally detest Trump, but AMLO refers to him as “my friend” while heaping praise on Trump, a renowned egomaniac. The Mexican president decided that faced with a hostile government in its major economic partner — 80 percent of trade and most investment is with the United States — the rule would be “avoid confrontation at all costs.”

The problem is not so much the ideological contradiction of being friends with a white supremacist billionaire who bashes Mexico at every opportunity. It's that to maintain this friendship AMLO has sacrificed the safety and wellbeing of thousands of Central American migrants. Trump threatened tariffs on Mexican exports, taxes on remittances and closing the border, and every time AMLO has ceded on migrant rights. His submission strengthens Trump and his anti-immigrant agenda, and erodes the Mexican president's position as a principled reformer with a human rights agenda.

The power of Washington and the international market has also led to a mixed approach to economic transformation. The United States, with the international financial system it leads, can make or break the Mexican economy. When Trump tweets a new threat, Mexico's stock market plummets. When North American Free Trade Agreement faltered, the peso devalued. When AMLO moved to bolster the state-owned oil compa-

ny PEMEX, rating agencies reduced investment ratings. López Obrador positioned a number of neoliberals in his cabinet to reassure capitalist interests, including his chief of staff, an investment banker and biotech industrialist. López

Obrador also supported the renegotiated and little-changed NAFTA, despite having criticized it as a pillar of neoliberalism.

His party MORENA has sponsored pro-business bills, including extending patents and promoting megaprojects, extractive industries and fossil-fuel development. To placate the private sector, the president did not include progressive tax reform, although his administration is closing up loopholes, increasing sanctions and doubling down on enforcement. He's orthodox in restricting government spending, debt and inflation, while increasing social programs, public banks, health care and services. The president's ambitious megaprojects, like the Maya Train, have sparked protests among indigenous organizations that view them as a continuation of handing over their land, territory and resources to private investors. At the same time, he never misses an opportunity to slam neoliberalism and employs strong rhetoric against the rich.

Whether this means that the “end of neoliberalism” will remain merely discursive or whether the president figures he's buying time to make structural changes and reduce Mexico's outward dependency at this stage is still not clear. There's a fine line between keeping control and losing the vision.

With these contradictions festering, the government could be setting itself up for internal fracturing and external attack. The enemies-as-friends strategy has arguably worked so far, but it poses serious dangers. Sometimes it's better to name your enemies and face them head on. Despite the short-term benefits, the contradictions could destroy the progressive agenda. Also, López Obrador will not say this out loud, but he badly needs a more progressive U.S. administration if he's to carry out the deep economic and political reforms promised. But then, so does the rest of the world.

### LESSON #3: DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE PROFOUNDLY RADICAL NATURE AND NEED FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

There's a final lesson that has captured national attention recently. As femicides and violence against women have risen, Mexican women have spearheaded increasingly strong protests, including university strikes, often targeting the presidency for indifference and inaction. López Obrador, who presides over a cabinet with 50-50 gender parity, seems to think this is the end point and that gender violence is just regular violence committed against “the weaker sex.” He has an opportunity to really go after lethal patriarchal power structures, but he doesn't have a critique of patriarchy and instead has criticized the demonstrations, stating that hidden forces are instigating the protests, rather than entering into dialogue. His government has not implemented an integral plan for gender equality and the eradication of violence against women.

No progressive agenda can consider this secondary.





SOPHIE NEIMAN

# BOBBI WINE BOBBI WINE BOBBI WINE BOBBI WINE BOBBI WINE BOBBI WINE

BY SOPHIE NEIMAN

KAMPALA, UGANDA — Bobi Wine strides across the manicured lawn of his compound and greets a large group of university students assembled there. He only slept a few hours the night before, forgoing rest to promote his new protest song, but if the pop-star-turned-opposition-leader is tiring, he doesn't show it.

Born Robert Kyagulanyi in Kampala's Kamwokya ghetto, Wine gained fame and fortune as a rapper.

"I grew up into a young man who loved music and saw in music the opportunity to communicate for myself, on my behalf, and on behalf of others," he tells me.

Over the years, his songs evolved from ditties about women and money into explosive political anthems. Now he is the most formidable threat to President Yoweri Museveni, the man who has presided over Uganda for more than three decades, deftly eradicating term and age limits.

Wine won a seat in Uganda's parliament in 2017, promising to represent the poor. The 38-year-old has been arrested on multiple occasions since, tortured, handed treason charges and says he's been forced to cancel some 150 concerts.

He remains undeterred and, in July, announced his intention to run for president in the 2021 elections. His movement, dubbed People Power, has gained momentum and support across Uganda. Young people, many of whom have never seen a president other than Museveni, revere Wine. Vendors in small markets sell t-shirts bearing Wine's face and boda-boda (motorcycle taxi) drivers are eager to talk politics as they whiz through traffic on the busy streets of Kampala, the capital of this impoverished East African nation of 43 million people.

In the midst of preparations for the upcoming election next February, Wine agreed to let me shadow him.

## A DANGEROUS SITUATION

We meet at Wine's home on the outskirts of Kampala on a blistering November morning. The property boasts a lavish white villa. Guinea fowl and rabbits peck at the verdant grass. The setting seems almost at odds with the populist uprising Wine promises to lead, but he and his followers say it is the only place they can assemble and speak freely.

"If we were living in a democratic country, we'd be in a hotel in Kampala," David Lewis, the executive secretary of People Power, tells student leaders from Makerere University. They've been rallying for weeks against a proposed 15 percent tuition hike and have faced an outpouring of violence from Uganda's military and police.

When Wine takes the microphone, the students shout and clap. Many wear red clothing and berets, symbols of the People Power movement.

"You are the gallant intellectuals of our generation," he says, amid a round of cheering. "But it must not stop at chanting. We must take it a notch higher or else we are not going to be different than the generations that have come before." Wine warns them of the dangers ahead. "They will unleash all kinds of oppression on you. They will arrest you. They will beat you."

He himself has seen his share of tribulations. In August of 2018, while the young politician was stumping for another opposition candidate in the northwestern town of Arua, his driver was shot and killed in what Wine suspects was a botched assassination attempt. Wine was subsequently arrested, tortured and charged with treason. He says he was beaten and that his genitals were squeezed with pliers.

At the time, Museveni dismissed Wine's claims as "fake news" but the opposition leader was so badly injured that he fled briefly to the United States for treatment before returning to Uganda. In April, 2019, he was again arrested, charged with holding an illegal demonstration and released on bail three days later.

"I fear for my life," Wine tells me. "Museveni wants me dead and he wants me dead yesterday."

## A GROUNDWELL OF SUPPORT

We leave the compound and head to another meeting. As the car bumps along Kampala's uneven streets, we pass Wine's old haunts in Kamwokya. Graffiti maligning Museveni and posters promoting Wine's cancelled concerts stain the walls. Residents here often scramble to make a living doing this and that. Shops with clothing, cellphones and beer are pressed

together. Hawkers sell vibrant cuts of papaya and watermelon from wooden carts. Women make chapati (flatbread) at ramshackle stands, their hands colored white with flour.

This is Wine's stronghold. As we speak, eager supporters press against the windows of the car.

"He will win according to how the people love him," a woman called Christine told me, when I visited the slum a few days later.

Winding past his childhood home, Wine shifts between political talk and jokes, and between English and Luganda, one of Uganda's many tribal languages.

I ask what inspired him to take the monumental challenge of running for president in an autocratic regime. He corrects me, saying the desperation, rather than inspiration, pushed him to challenge Museveni.

"I don't like having to be in danger," he says. "I love my children and I'd rather be with my kids now, with my beautiful wife. I'd rather be home. I don't like this, but I am doing it out of desperation. We waited for people to save us. Nobody is saving us. We want to save ourselves."

## UGANDAN ELECTIONS

Uganda's most recent presidential elections in 2016 were marred by internet shutdowns and reports that ballots were delivered late to opposition areas. Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change and the leading opposition candidate at the time, was placed under house arrest. Reporters were subject to censorship, threats and violence, and media outlets were shut down, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Should Wine win in 2021, he will be Uganda's first democratically elected leader since the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1962.

"People Power supporters will make sure to seal all of the loopholes that Museveni would have used to rig the election," Wine says. "We are going to register massively. We are going to come out massively and we are going to guard our vote."

There are times, however, when Wine's populism sounds eerily like that of a young Museveni, who, after, seizing power in a guerrilla war in 1986, famously claimed that his presidency would not be a "mere change of guards."

"We are different," says Joel Ssenyonyi, a spokesperson for People Power. "We want to take power legitimately, nonviolently and without shedding blood."

Wine's top political priorities are to restore democracy to his country and give the population a voice in governance.

"Everything that has been set up to support that dictatorship will be crushed immediately," he tells me. "I have to destroy that godly image of the president. For the first time you will see a president who is a human being, who is accountable to human beings and answerable to human beings."

## RISKS TO DISSIDENTS

If Bobi Wine is in danger, so are many of his followers.

"The challenges I go through are in no way comparable to the challenges that the wider population goes through," he says.

On a gray morning a few days after my meeting with the opposition leader, I spoke with Julius Kateregga, president of Makerere University's student guild and an avid fan of Wine. Kateregga walks with a limp, which he says is the result of being tortured due to his participation in the student protests.

"There are a number of threats, especially on our lives," he said. "We continue to persevere. We want to encourage others not to give up on the fight and to put our nation first, before ourselves."

## INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION

Shortly after our time together, Wine departed on a trip to the Unit-

Continued on next page



SOPHIE NEIMAN



Andrew Edlin's uncle Paul spent much of his life going from job to job while diligently making art in his small New York City apartment. Born deaf during the Great Depression, by the 1980s he was exclusively producing extraordinary collages made of micro-dissected postage stamps.

In 1995, Edlin, who was working in finance, took samples of his uncles' work to various galleries in Soho, where he was informed that it was "outsider art," a term that he was then unfamiliar with. Aarne Anton of the American Primitive Gallery, however, immediately responded to the work.

To definitively diagnose what does or does not constitute an outsider artist is a somewhat contentious subject, and as often as not results in futile flailing in what amounts to little more than a semantic quagmire. That being said, there is at least some consensus on the history of the idea of an "outsider artist."

The turn of the 20th century saw a growing interest in art produced outside the boundaries of official culture, indeed, outside the boundaries of society itself. Noted artists of the day, such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst and the members of the German art movement, Der Blaue Reiter, among others, began to draw inspiration from the work of children and what they perceived as primitive cultures; from individuals who were long term inmates of psychiatric hospitals and prisons, hermits, recluses, and eccentrics whose work was imbued with an expressive power born of what was perceived as a lack of sophistication.

The French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet, in a quest for a more authentic and humanistic approach to artistic expression coined the term "art brut" — an attempt to identify those artists whose work was oblivious to what he described as "the futile society, the fallacious parade."

It was almost another 30 years before the concept of art brut would be bought to a wider audience, when, in 1972, the art scholar Roger Cardinal, who passed away last year at the age of 79, published the first English language book on the subject. Its title: *Outsider Art*.

Cardinal himself was not a fan of the title and claimed that it was forced upon him by his publishers.

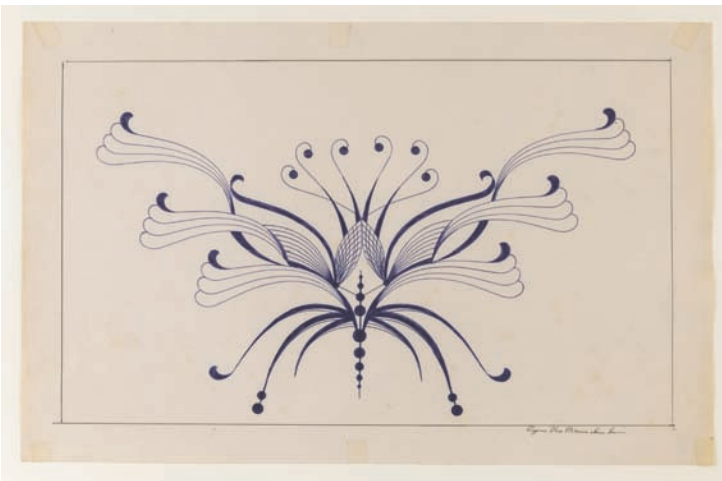
"In the end there is no such thing as outsider art," he wrote, "no more than there is such a thing as the general public. There is only the ferment of individuality."

Nonetheless, the term has stood the test of time and remains the widely accepted descriptor for the work of the untrained artist.

Edlin shares Cardinal's misgivings. When broached on the subject he gives an almost imperceptible shake of the head.

"It's something we are stuck with," he says. "For me, the term outsider artist implies some sort of rebel, someone who chooses to refuse to conform to societal norms, which is something of a fallacy. These are artists whose work is not concerned with rebellion or conformity, it is work that is not concerned with conscious evolving."

The ensuing press and sales of his uncle's art resulted in significant life changes for Andrew and Paul.



Inspired by his uncle's success, Edlin opened his first gallery in a loft space in Chelsea in 2001 with a program dedicated to outsider artists. Over the years, it has switched locations a number of times, but has consistently presented provocative and critically acclaimed shows from both trained and untrained artists. The gallery's place in the outsider art world was cemented when, in 2006, it was awarded exclusive representation of the estate of Henry Darger — known for his strange and often-violent portrayals of transgender Catholic school girls battling the forces of evil in outer space and long considered one of the world's most celebrated outsider artists.

By 2011, Edlin and his company, Wide Open Arts, as-

sumed control over the Outsider Art Fair, purchasing it from its founder Sandy Smith. The event offers the best opportunity to view the works of the world's most established and up-and-coming outsider artists and has grown under Edlin's leadership to host a sister fair in Paris every autumn. This January marked the 28th anniversary of its original New York City incarnation, as the Metropolitan Pavilion played host to dozens of galleries from across the world.

Today, you'll find Edlin's gallery, which bears his name, at 212 Bowery.

"I couldn't resist the resonance of the street number!" he says, referring to the iconic Manhattan telephone prefix.

Running from Feb. 28 to April 11, the gallery's next show features the work of Eugene von Bruenchenhein and Karla Knight.

Von Bruenchenhein was an extraordinarily prolific Milwaukee-born artist who, over a period of 50 years until his death in 1983, produced a wide variety of images and sculptural objects. Although his work remained undiscovered until after his death, he is perhaps best known for his oil paintings, hallucinatory and abstract images daubed on masonite and cardboard using the artists' fingers.

What makes his work most interesting however, is that unlike most outsider artists, who rarely experiment with new mediums or visual styles, von Bruenchenhein's body of work is remarkably eclectic. His oeuvre includes sculptures made from chicken bones and a series of erotic photographic portraits of his wife. Perhaps lesser known are his meticulous geometric designs executed on paper with ball point pen, and it is a selection of these that will comprise the work on show.

Unlike von Bruenchenhein, Knight is a trained artist whose work is in the collections of Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum, among others. This show features new work from her series *Notes from the Lightship*. This series of diagrammatic paintings and drawings feature a constructed language of hieroglyphics and symbols that the artist has developed over a period of 20 years.

The work of these two artists is both enigmatic and provocative. Though born of markedly different circumstances, it shares a paradox in that its apparent ineffability invites the viewer to imagine and perhaps even momentarily experience the state of grace that is not knowing.

"It's not about deciphering the work," says Knight. "It's about living with the unknown."

**Paul Edlin (1931–2008).**  
**"Geometry of Dreams,"**  
 2000. Postage stamp  
 fragments on board, 16 x  
 20 inches.

**OUTSIDE MAN:**  
 Andrew Edlin.

**Eugene Von**  
**Bruenchenhein. *Untitled*,**  
 c. 1965. Ballpoint pen  
 on paper. 11.75 x 17.75  
 inches.

## UGANDA

*Continued from previous page*

ed States, where he met with members of the Ugandan diaspora and with human rights organizations.

"We are trying to galvanize this international attention on him and his cause and the People Power movement in general," said Jeffrey Smith, founder of Vanguard Africa, a Washington-based organization that works to support democratic leaders on the continent.

That appears to be happening. In November, Wine was listed on Time Magazine's 100

Next list and in December he won the Africa Freedom Prize from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Johannesburg, South Africa. .

"When you have a sustained international spotlight on a country," says Smith, "that really emboldens people to go out and to protest and to speak their minds, and to criticize the government that has lorded over them for over three decades. When they go to queue for hours to vote in 2021, they will know, hopefully, that their votes won't be in vain."

But in January, several months after our meeting, Bobi Wine and members of his team were again arrested.

"I spent two days in a small police cell,"

Ssenyonyi wrote me in a WhatsApp message. "We were so crammed in there we all couldn't sit down at the same time. Sitting had to be done in turns throughout the day and night."

All were subsequently released, but the crackdown seems to be yet another predictor of dangers to come.

"The repeated harassment and detention of members of the opposition by the government of Uganda has had a chilling effect on the climate of free and fair elections," Eliot Engel, a Democratic Congressman from New York who serves on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement.

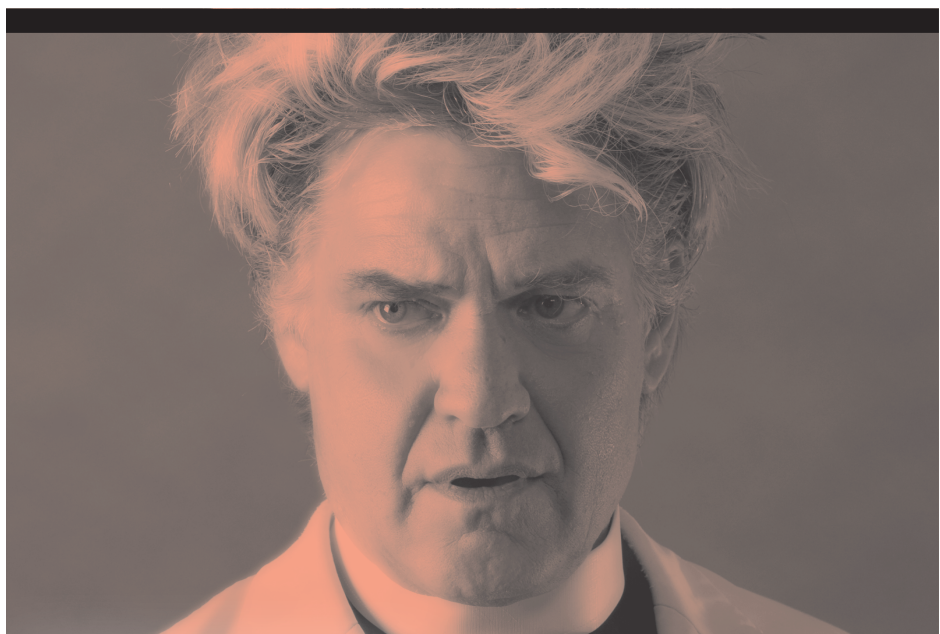
The United State's nonetheless provides

\$970 million in economic and military aid to Uganda annually, which it considers a strategic partner in combatting terrorism in the Horn of Africa.

In November, I asked Wine if he has a message for the international community.

"Keep your eyes on Uganda," he said. "That's all we want from the world. Don't take your eyes off of us, because when you take your eyes off of us you will be sentencing us to the brutal dictator." "





# TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

*Have you been following all hysteria over the end of cash bail? As someone who has had multiple encounters with the courts, I know how the system is stacked against us. I campaigned for the law and cheered when it passed. I find it outrageous that this hard-won change could be rolled back. How do we combat the stories of fear circulating in the press? It seems like they are overriding people's reason. Even people that were initially enthusiastic about the change are telling me now it 'went too far.'*

— DIXON, South Bronx

Dear Dixon,  
For those of us who seek change in society, our spiritual leaders aren't the religious professionals, least of all the hard-right apocalyptic Christians who surround Trump. Our spiritual leaders are black mothers who lost children and husbands, shot by police. Our spiritual leaders are the elders of the First Nations, targeted by the soldiers of the poisoners of Earth's life.

These teachers are actively colonized, jailed, forced away from the best ideas of America — from freedom and solvency and safety. They teach us a longview, radical patience that revolutionizes living. They teach us to hide in plain sight of fascists and emerge in our own vivid way.

In the five terms of Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, the post-9/11 racism of the New York police force has hardened into a violent cult. The attack on reasonable bail reform is an effort to repeal justice for black and brown people, and to keep superior, in an always-going-on way, the white cult.

Those of us who have been in the Tombs know that it is completely black and brown down there. Black-guilt-proven-by-white-arrest is obvious when the jailer says, "Why are you here? You must have done something. Why are you here?"

We have the resources, the resilience, the power of our spiritual teachers. The surviving mothers have already won the struggle for their families and communities. They guide Earth's love and stream it through us. There is reason for hope. Police violence is failing.

You'll be OK Dixon. Let's keep working.

— REV

Wow, Reverend,  
It looks like Bernie has a real chance at the Democratic nomination. People power might finally win the day. A socialist could be President of the United States of America. I've been a socialist since my first job at the Taco Bell in Sandusky, Ohio 20 some years ago. I'm giddy. I'm ecstatic. But something in me is also wary. We've been burned before. (Who can forget 2016?)

*I'm worried that by allowing myself to feel this joy, I'm setting myself up for a let down. Should I temper my expectations? I feel like I've been told to do that my entire life. I'm fucking sick of it. But I'm also realizing it's a comforting habit.*

— AMBER, South Slope

Dear Amber,  
Fear of righteous justice. Fear of the triumph of compassion. Fear of joy!

Well, if enough of us are afraid, then justice won't happen, right? In 2020, our fear would let the big boys move in and create that joy for us — as a product, a simulation, an opportunity for speculators. The idealism of a freedom-fighter is a juicy profit-center.

Bernie Sanders is making a break through by way of his direct, passionate honesty, and millions have shared their modest gifts because they sense that they can share that justice and conviction with this old guy.

Amber, you say you're caught between risky idealism and the play-it-safe moderation. But we don't have a choice, do we? In 2020, all freedom-fighters are shadowed by fascism and the Earth's crisis. If you are fucking sick of tempering your expectations, then know that's true for a lot of us. But if we feel the power of this joy together, we can't be let down.

— BERNIELUJAH!

**TAGLINE: REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. HAVE A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REV.BILLY@INDYPEN-DENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.**

**Law and Disorder radio**

Listen to the show each week and download podcasts at **Lawanddisorder.org**

Airing on over 125 stations around the nation

"Our basic constitutional rights are in jeopardy. "Law and Disorder" is an excellent magazine format radio show, hosted by progressive lawyers who analyze the state of civil rights in this post-9/11 period. From attacks on Muslims at home to torture abroad, "Law and Disorder" puts these constitutional attacks into perspective"

— AMY GOODMAN  
HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!

Co-founded by:  
**Michael Ratner** (1943-2016)  
President, Center for Constitutional Rights;  
and hosted by movement lawyers:  
**Heidi Boghosian**,  
Executive Director, A. Muste Memorial Institute;  
and **Michael Steven Smith**,  
New York City attorney and author.

**NOW ON FACEBOOK.COM**

**bluestockings**  
radical bookstore | activist center | fair trade cafe  
172 ALLEN ST • 212-777-6028  
bluestockings.com

**the Air** — Max Elbaum

**FEMINIST THEORY**

**SAT MARCH 7 • 7-930PM**  
BOOK LAUNCH: Yao Xiao reads from Everything Is Beautiful, and I'm Not Afraid, a graphic novel about searching for a place in America.

**SAT MARCH 21 • 7-930PM**  
TALK: Writers K.M. Szpara and Sam J. Miller, discuss queering speculative fiction, anti-capitalist literature and fandom.

**SUN FEB 23 • 7-9:30PM**  
OPEN MIC: Get On Stage features poems, prose, music, stand-up and spoken word from queer voices of color.

**RESIST!**  
ZAPATISTA STORE

**HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES**

**MAJOR MINOR**  
FREE LIVE MUSIC SERIES | SUNDAYS AT STARR BAR

**1ST SUNDAYS**  
6PM | **SWING DANCE CLASS AND SOCIAL**  
SIGN UP AT WWW.STARRBAR.COM/SWING  
9PM | **SWING JAZZ NIGHT** WITH TAMAR KORN

**2ND SUNDAYS**  
9PM | **PIANO CABARET** WITH SHAYE TROHA

**3RD SUNDAYS**  
6PM | **SWING DANCE CLASS & SOCIAL**  
WITH SERAPHINA MALLON-BREIMAN AND KATIE MARTUCCI  
9PM | **FOLK U!** WITH FATBOY WILSON, OLD VIEJO BONES, MIRIAM ELHAJLI

**4TH SUNDAYS**  
9PM | **WORLD FUSION NIGHT** WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

**5TH SUNDAYS**  
9PM | **BEST OF WEEKLY MONDAYS OPEN MIC** WITH QUECEE

**STARR BAR**  
CONSPIRE • CREATE • CELEBRATE

**VIEW / BOOK EVENTS**  
STARRBAR.COM | @STARRBARBK  
214 STARR ST, BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN



THE FABULOUS  
**J A L O P Y**  
THEATRE

★ PRESENTS ★

**BROOKLYN**

# FOLK FESTIVAL

**April 17th - 19th, 2020**  
[brooklynfolkfest.com](http://brooklynfolkfest.com)

**St. Ann's Church**  
157 Montague St.

WORLD FAMOUS  
BANJO TOSS  
COMPETITION!

JAM SESSIONS!

FILM SCREENINGS!

SQUARE DANCE! SALSA!

WORKSHOPS!

PUPPET SHOW by the  
Boxcutter Collective

NOLA DANCE PARTY!

& MORE!

**Les Filles  
de Illighadad**

**The Cactus Blossoms**

**Che Apalache**

**Nora Brown**

**Dan + Claudia  
Zanes**

**Eva Salina**

**Ali Dineen**

**Jerron  
Paxton**

**The Legendary  
Ingramettes**

**Love Struck Balladeers**

**Down Hill Strugglers**

**Feral Foster**

**Frankie Sunswept  
& The Sunwrays**

**Megg Farrell  
Wyndham Baird  
Willy Gantrim**

**The Birdman  
of Rome**

**Emily Eagen  
& Chris Q.  
Murphy**

**Duo  
Filamistrocca**

**Jackson  
& the Janks**

**Four o'Clock Flowers**

**Brotherhood of the Jug Band Blues • The Jalopy Chorus • Julia Patinella**

**Ginny's Kitchen • Miriam Elhajli • The Other Years • Lucky 5**

**The Hayrollers • Sam Doores • Bobby Blue the Balladeer • Kyle Tigges**

**Harry Smith B-Sides Release • Fatboy Wilson & Old Viejo Bones • Sinner Friends**

**Willie Martinez & The NYC Salsa All Stars • Tepeyolohtli Sones de Tarima**

**NYC Cultural  
Affairs**

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.